

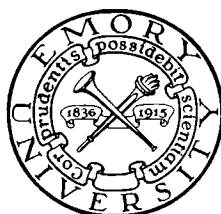
PARLOUR LIBRARY—SIXPENNY SERIES

THE
DREAM AND THE WAKING

BY ANNIE THOMAS.



ROBERT W. WOODRUFF
LIBRARY



THE
DREAM AND THE WAKING

A Tale

BY

ANNIE THOMAS

(MRS. PENDER CUDLIP)

AUTHOR OF "DENIS DONNE," "HIGH STAKES," "LADY LORME,"
ETC.

PARLOUR LIBRARY EDITION

LONDON

WARD, LOCK, AND TYLER

WARWICK HOUSE, PATERNOSTER ROW

[*All rights reserved*]

THE PARLOUR LIBRARY.

NEW ISSUE.

PROBABLY no Series of Novels ever published attained more universal acceptance than those published in the PARLOUR LIBRARY. First in quality, as a series, largest in quantity, and comprising the most Popular Works of the most successful Novelists, the PARLOUR LIBRARY took and held a leading position which excited the envy and aroused the imitativensness of the Publishing Trade. An overstocked market was the natural result. Time, however, which tries all things, has demonstrated the necessity for Cheap and Good Books, such as the PARLOUR LIBRARY only admitted, and such as it is intended henceforth to produce in the following manner:—

- I. A Series of Volumes at Sixpence each.
- II. A Series of Volumes at One Shilling each.
- III. A Series of Volumes at Two Shillings each.

*** These Books will be chosen with the most scrupulous care; and while every Work will be complete in itself, each Book will also be the best of its kind. Quality will be united to quantity. Parents may order these Books for their children with unqualified confidence in their perfect suitability for family perusal.

London : WARD, LOCK, and TYLER, Paternoster Row.

THE DREAM AND THE WAKING.

CHAPTER I.

All that's best of dark and bright,
Meet in her aspect and her eyes.

THE writer of the verse commencing

Vice is a monster of such hideous mien,
That to be hated, needs but to be seen !

clearly had not seen all forms of it. Many he had doubtless, and they had left an unpleasant impression upon his mind, but not all ; for instance, he had never seen Mrs. Adair.

She was vice incarnate, but she was not "hideous" by any means. On the contrary, she was a very bewitching mass of silk, tulle, and sin. How many hearts had she wounded, and wronged, and dishonoured and broken ? How many deceptive speeches had issued from that rosy mouth, that looked so pure, good, and womanly ?

The day was hot in the extreme. The "upper ten thousand" looked, as they lolled back in their carriages that day, either flaccid, of a white heat, or, worse still, of a dusky red.

Mrs. Adair was pressing the pavement of Regent-street ; she had the fair excuse of being a pedestrian ; yet she was as fresh, as perfect at all points, as when she had started some hours before from her suburban villa residence ; her delicate skirt of pale silver-grey grenadine was daintily raised in one silver-grey kidded hand. It floated around her in a cloudy fashion, rendered "distinct" by the black lace—Spanish lace ; she wore the real article, a seventy-guinea shawl. Her bonnet was a French bonnet, therefore indescribable ; but it was as perfect in all its component parts as was the crimson rose which rested, under the brim, upon her intensely black hair. Her eyes were lakes of fire, brilliancy, and sweetness—a trifle *too* bright, perhaps ; they blazed sometimes. Not the rose which bloomed in her bonnet, on that bed of lustrous hair, glowed with a richer, brighter tint than that pretty woman's cheeks ; they were so blooming, indeed, that men, in passing, eyed them admiringly, and women suspiciously. Glorious in womanly charms of a higher order than are often to be met with, and in French millinery which would render even a plain woman charming, Mrs. Adair walked along, radiant, until she came to the door of a jeweller's shop, at which she paused a moment before entering, just to bestow a comprehensive glance over a carriage and pair of sturdy brown horses that stood there waiting. When she walked into the shop, she had ample time for observation, for the attention of the presiding young spirits of the gems, was concentrated on a party that stood at a counter at the opposite side—two ladies and a gentleman.

The elder lady was a stout, good-humoured matron of about fifty, with a handsome, healthy, florid face,

and in handsome, expensive, florid attire. "Evidently the owner of that elegant equipage; they are both of country build," murmured Mrs. Adair to herself, with a sneer. The younger lady was a tall, fair girl, with a fine gracieuse figure, and a face such as Leech loves; she had the upturned eye and lash readers of *Punch* are so familiar with. The gentleman fell under Mrs. Adair's notice last, but directly her eyes rested on that fine, handsome, perfect type of the fair, well-bred Englishman, a visible shock ran through her frame, and rapidly crossing the shop, she placed one well-gloved hand on his arm, exclaiming, "Lewis Gordon! you in town?"

He turned round with a visible increase of colour on his pale face, and in reply to her eager question, remark, salutation, call it what you will, answered, "Yes! I am in town." This being a statement of such a very apparent fact, went to prove nothing more than the gentleman's embarrassment.

"And being in town, you will, I am sure, come down to see me."

She smiled sweetly as she asked it. The young clergyman, for Lewis Gordon was a clergyman, though it was not shown in the cut of his coat, did not seem to view the invitation at all in an enthusiastic light; on the contrary, he seemed rather desirous of bringing the interview to a close, for he made no sign of acquiescence, and began tapping his boot with the cane he carried.

She—that woman with the crimson rose and the lustrous hair—saw he did not want her to stand there before him, all beautiful as she was, any longer; but she was not to be baffled; no man had ever succeeded in baffling her yet. In a lower tone than she

had before spoken in, she said, just indicating them with her hand, and conveying, at the same time, the knowledge to him that she desired an introduction—

“Your friends; are they?”

“In town for a few days *only*,” he interrupted hastily.

“You will surely introduce me, *Lewis*,” she did not emphasise the word as I have done, she just *breathed* upon it in a way that surpasses typography.

“I should be happy to do so,” he answered, rather nervously, “but, as I tell you, they are only in town for a day or two.”

She half closed her large dark eyes, and began, “Lewis! have you forgotten my name—Mrs. Adair?”

Something in the tone altered his resolution, for he said, hurriedly, “Mrs. Adair—Mrs. Reeve, Miss Reeve.”

“Being such an old friend of Lewis’s must be the excuse for this out-of-the-way proceeding,” said Mrs. Adair, when the bows and short speeches of civility had been gone through successfully, making it appear by her manner that she had succumbed to Lewis’s entreaties, instead of having driven him, sorely against his will, to do the deed of introduction.

Mrs. Reeve, who looked upon every fresh introduction as the beginning for her of a new and happy epoch, said—

“She was delighted, she was sure, and only wondered Lewis had never mentioned such a charming ‘old friend,’ but perhaps he has to Claire.” She went on nodding and laughing, and, *almost* to Mrs. Adair’s

amusement, *winking*. "More's said to her than to me ; you understand."

Mrs. Adair directed one lightning glance at Miss Claire Reeve, and then turning to the counter, after saying, "Oh yes, perfectly," she asked for a bracelet of some particular make ; it did not seem easy to find, so after a little brow-knitting and lip-compressing, and a few other graceful signs of impatience had been given, she said—

"It must match *this*," essaying at the same time to unclasp a bracelet from her arm ; but the bracelet was refractory, and would *not* come off, unless Mr. Gordon would be so very kind as to assist—thank him very much ; giving him *so much* trouble.

Lewis Gordon undid it with a trembling hand, and took occasion to whisper, "Be careful, Bella—for mercy's sake, be careful."

"You will come, then," she replied, in her low whisper, "to-night."

"Anywhere—any time ; what is your address ?" She laid a couple of her cards down on the counter ; they bore the name of "Mrs. Adair" in the best style of engraving, and written in the corner was the address, "Aspen Cottage, Blackheath Park ;" and then she bowed herself away from them after a few more short sentences, and walked away.

Claire Reeve completed her purchases in an aggrieved, not to say savage, frame of mind. It is *not* pleasant, doubtless, to be taken into a shop by the lover of your choice, in full and entire confidence that you are the "first, the only one, his heart has thought of for a minute," and to meet in that shop a lady possessed of beauty to a degree you cannot ignore, and

who claims to be an old and special friend of that lover's. When, moreover, he has never mentioned her to you, and you see her presence affects him in an unaccountable way. Claire's honest grey eyes had never looked darker or deeper with love than they did now with anger, as she bent them on Lewis; and when, at last, their business ended, she walked out and took her seat in the carriage, there was a red spot on her usually creamy-pale cheeks.

The street was rather crowded, and the horses went at a foot-pace. I have not a hated enemy in the world; if I had I would wish him to be seated in a close carriage, which is going at a foot-pace, with the girl he is engaged to seated opposite to him, and jealous of a rival whom, for "reasons unknown," he cannot assist her in skinning alive."

"What a pretty woman that Mrs. Adair is, to be sure, Lewis!" remarked, in all unconscious innocence, Mrs. Reeve.

"Do you think so, mamma? I can't call any woman pretty who rouges, and——"

"I don't think she does that; I believe her colour to be her own," Lewis Gordon replied, and then hastily added—"Look, Claire, that cab-horse will get smashed to a certainty; really the driving in London is wonderful—wonderful!"

"Oh, never mind the driving, Lewis; tell me about this Mrs. Adair: who she is, and how long you have known her."

"I knew an Ernest Adair," broke in Mrs. Reeve. "I wonder whether she's his wife; Adair of Craig-tulloch, in Perthshire—he was as nice a young man as ever——"

"Her husband's name was not Ernest," said Lewis, almost pettishly.

"But he may be a brother of Ernest's. Adair of Craigtulloch—the *old* man, the *father* of Ernest, you know—had a lot of sons—six or seven, I don't know which it was ; but six *or* seven."

"*May* be a brother ! I *should* hope, mamma, that if she had a husband alive she wouldn't go into such absurd raptures at seeing another man as she did just now in a public shop ; it's disgusting. She's a widow— isn't she, Lewis ?"

"Yes, that is—yes ; of course she is."

"Why 'of course ?' Now, Lewis, why should she be a widow more than every other woman one meets ?"

"Do ask her, Lewis, when you see her, to tell you if her husband was a brother of Ernest Adair's. Shall we go to the Park, Claire ?"

"I have a headache, mamma dear ; and it's insufferably hot ; still, if you *wish*——"

"No, no, my dear," interrupted her good-natured parent ; "we'll go home at once, then. I only thought we might meet some one we know, and that's always so pleasant."

Truly amiable Mrs. Reeve !

"More likely to see some more of Lewis's 'old friends,' mamma ; say, are we not, Lewis ? When are you going to see her ?"

"I don't know. I am not sure about going to see her at all. A fellow hasn't time to be rushing round, 'making calls' on everybody."

"Oh, Lewis ! not 'on everybody ;' but I should imagine this a *very* exceptional case. Besides, I heard you promise."

"You will come in and dine with us, Lewis," said kind Mrs. Reeve, when the carriage stopped at last at the door of their hotel.

"Not to-day, thank you," said the harassed Lewis. "I have an appointment—a business appointment with a fellow. Good-bye, Claire."

"Good-bye," said the young lady, giving him the tips of her fingers; "a queer time of day for business. Good-bye; *do* come in, mamma."

Perhaps the thought that it was a "queer time of day for business" only occurred to Lewis when he left them, and had time for reflection—a thing which, I must confess, had been denied to him from the moment of Mrs. Adair's appearance. At any rate I would rather suppose such to be the case than believe it possible for a young clergyman of rigorous High Church principles to be guilty of telling a story. Instead of meeting any "fellow" he walked away to a coffee-house by himself, where, in place of an orthodox dinner, he refreshed himself with a cup of the strong black, exhilarating beverage. He sat with his elbow resting on the table, and his face on his hand, and there was that "something" in his air and look which made the most casual visitor to the place gaze at him and say, "Surely that young fellow has lost some heavy stake." The young, fair, blue-eyed, strikingly handsome man had just the appearance of a gambler who has received some awful check in mid-career.

When the clock struck seven he rose, muttering to himself, "The follies of my boyhood are finding me out with a vengeance;" and called a cab, which he directed to drive to "North Kent line, London-bridge." He got out at the Blackheath station at

eight o'clock, and on hearing how short the distance was, proceeded on foot to Blackheath Park.

Mrs. Adair had returned home to her six o'clock dinner; returned in time to make a very exquisite *toilette* for it, which, as she was alone, one would have thought unnecessary. The matchless boy who opened the door to her—and whose rotundity of chest and profusion of buttons caused him to be the envy, and consequently the derision, of all the vulgar boys of the neighbourhood—informed her, in reply to her eager question, that “no one had called.” This answer seemed to relieve her immensely. Could that lovely, rich, brilliant woman dread *any one*, or had she only a general sensible horror of morning calls.

“Dress Miss Ada prettily,” she said to her maid when she was about descending to her dinner; “I may want her to-night.”

At about eight o'clock she began to listen and watch, and a few minutes after, “Mr. Gordon” was announced.

He came in neither pale nor trembling now, but with a proud determination in face and manner that made her regard him with admiration—nay, more.

“Shall I let that pale-faced girl win him from *me*? Never!” she said to herself as she rose to greet him.

“I am here at your bidding; now what do you want, *Mrs. Adair*?”

“In the first place I want—not to be called *Mrs. Adair* any longer; the old name from your lips falls more softly, more naturally on my ears.”

She had a marvellous voice, a perfect intonation, a wonderful play of feature, and this evening *she tried* to charm.

“When we parted—years ago now—we decided

that 'henceforth we should be as strangers' to each other ; that arrangement is incompatible with a familiarity of address."

He did not seek to avoid or meet her eyes ; his indifference stung her.

"When we parted !" she commenced, pathetically. "Ah, Lewis ! but things have changed since then ; he *was* dead."

"Bella !"

"Ah ! that touches you, does it ?" she said, with flashing eyes. "It grieves you sorely, does it ? You have grown to hate *me* in these years, and love another, perhaps. Tell me ; *are* you engaged to that girl ?"

"To what girl ?"

"Don't bandy words with *me*, Lewis Gordon," she said, haughtily. "To that girl I saw in the shop, to-day."

"I hate the word 'engaged.' I am going to marry Miss Claire Reeve."

"And yet 'engaged' would be a better word in your case than 'going to marry.' You will perhaps recognise the inaccuracy of that phrase when you reflect on what I told you just now—he *was* dead."

"Isabel, you are deceiving me."

"I am *not*. Now, will you keep a promise you made me once ?"

"What is it ?"

"I am tired of being called 'Mrs. Adair.'"

She spoke slowly, and laid her beautiful hand on his ; he shook her off as if she stung him.

"Never ; you are mad, Bella, and trying to make me so, too. Let me go."

"Not till you assure me that engagement shall be

broken off at once ; promise me *that*, and *I* will be quiet,"

"I promise ; let me go."

"Stop one moment," she said, ringing the bell. "What would Miss Claire Reeve say to *your daughter*, I wonder ?"

He looked at her keenly, and she answered the unspoken thought.

"Yes, Lewis ; you have never thought, never asked, never *cared* for the result of that journey which separated us."

"Am I so unhappy, indeed ?" he said, sadly. "Let me see my child, Bella."

Soon, in obedience to Mrs. Adair's order, a lovely child, some four or five years old, came dancing into the room. Not all the flounces and ribbons with which she was almost smothered, could conceal her extreme loveliness. Unlike her beautiful southern-faced mother, Ada had large, deep blue eyes and bright golden hair.

Lewis Gordon took her up on his knee without speaking. He sat for a minute or two with his face down on the child's bright head ; then he looked up and said, almost humbly :

"Will you let me have this little darling, Bella ?"

"You have love to *give her*, then ?" she asked, eagerly.

"Love to give *her*—yes. I ask again, let me have her."

"Go now, Ada," Mrs. Adair said kindly to the child ; "we do not want you any longer, darling." "Ah ! I have found a way to his heart *now*," she thought, triumphantly, as she saw the lingering clasp and kiss Lewis bestowed on the child.

"I can talk to you no longer to-night, Bella ; I feel almost distracted ! Let me go."

"I will not even ask you to come again, Lewis," she said, quietly, as she held his hand at parting, "for you feel now that *you must* ; but such scenes are not good for my household, who, I feel confident, are airing their eyes and ears at the keyhole. You shall not come here again until you are calmer. I go to the opera on Saturday ; on Saturday morning I'll send you a note, giving you the number of my box. You must join me there."

"Not there, Bella."

"Yes, *there*. *I will* have it so," she replied, imperiously, with a stamp of the little foot ; "am I not your wife ? And then I will decide as to whether I will let you have Ada or not ; but however I decide, Lewis Gordon, be assured that I have a *mother's heart for Ada !*" She touched him more with those few words than by all else she had said.

When Mr. Gordon left her Mrs. Adair drew her chair to a writing-table, and hastily scribbled off a short note.

"I have done as you ordered me ; *seen* Mr. Gordon, that is, instead of *written* to him. Your injunctions are obeyed. Do not come here ; your appearance might shock the proprieties of this place, but meet me on Saturday morning in Kensington Gardens, same tree as before."

When she had folded and placed it in an envelope, she directed it to "S. Dessanges, Esq., Great Western Hotel."

"The vile wretch !" she said to herself, in cold, cutting, clear accents, as she gazed at the name she had written.

Late into the night Mrs. Adair sat playing brilliant pieces at her magnificently-toned piano ; and all at once, after a long time, she broke into "Com' è bello." Her rich, powerful, thrillingly sweet voice seemed the very soul of passion, as she sang those tender words. Of whom could she have been thinking, as she poured out that song.

It was late—or early morning, rather—before Mrs. Adair pressed her pillow. Had she a bad conscience, or did she simply like turning night into day ? Or was she so much amused with her own performance that she did not heed how rapidly the fleeting hours went by ? Or was she making plans for the future ? I do not know. She might have been one on whose "bosom's lord" a sin the more or less sat lightly enough. It is not the wicked people who sleep the worst. At any rate, beautiful, heartless "vice" sat long into the night, singing "Com' è bello."

We have seen her in hot Regent-street, under a trying sun ; let us now, if the kind reader *can* stand a little more millinery, look at her when the heat of the day has given way to a touching evening languor. Let us look at her as she sits there, with the full blaze of half-a-dozen wax candles falling full upon her.

I said before she had changed her attire. In place of the silvery grenadine there reigned a rich blue, clouded *moire antique*, a blue that was blue at night—cut low, with short sleeves ; and around the body and arms there was a quantity of rich, soft black lace. Her lustrous black hair was taken back over her tiny ears, and braided round the back of the handsomest little head in the world, where it was confined with a cut steel comb. The lace on her sleeve did not

reach midway to her elbow, and there was not a bracelet to mar the perfect beauty of her arm ; that arm, small, round, white and massive as a statue's. Her forehead was rather low, but wide, and when she was not speaking, there was always a slight line of care or thought across it. She had the haughtiest, and at the same time, the loveliest mouth from which soft tones have ever issued, and the pure line of her nose and chin are not to be shadowed forth by any word-painting. But, after all, when every other feature had excited rapturous admiration, you found that her eyes were what absorbed you most ; they and their long black lashes and exquisite brows completely divided her face into two distinct parts, they were so splendidly large and dark. I am conscious that my poor language will hardly give a correct idea of that which I wish to convey ; *this* perhaps will express it better—a black velvet band across her face could not have been more “marked” than were Mrs. Adair's eyes and their lashes.

She was rather a tall woman ; a tall woman, with wide, sloping shoulders, and a tiny waist, and a long, arching throat. She had a peculiar walk ; it was undulating, and yet not like a cat's. She never tripped or skipped in any elastic, volatile fashion ; or shuffled, or “pranced,” as too many women do. She “walked” like a woman who knows “walking” is an art, and has accordingly studied it, would do.

And so, leaving Lewis Gordon to go back to his hotel and toss impatiently through the long hours of the night, as his brow presses a pillow that memory is rendering a thorny one. And leaving Claire to dream, in her girlish faith, of a realised beau-ideal, a modern Bayard, of a heart true, loyal, fresh, untried as her

own ; and to wake occasionally to think Mrs. Adair a "most unpleasant person." And leaving Mrs. Adair to solace herself with sweet music, and to sing "Com' è bello" late into the night, I will bring my first chapter to a conclusion.

CHAPTER II.

You changed a wholesome heart to gall.

SATURDAY morning, twelve o'clock. The ride was pretty full, in spite of its being late in the season, but though it *was* pretty full, there was not a better-trained, more showy-looking lady's horse there than the one on which Mrs. Adair was mounted, nor a better-fitting habit than the one she wore; and what an unexceptionable pad-groom Buttons made, to be sure.

That little bay horse must have had a splendid mouth, or she would never have taken him so close to the rails every now and then. She was watching for some one, and she constantly kept an outside place; she rode with the third pommel, and her little bay would have had some trouble to unseat her.

Many acquaintances were quite proud to raise their hats to pretty Mrs. Adair, who returned all bows with a "stand off" and "keep your distance to-day, if you please," air.

By-and-bye she got off, and made her way on foot to a shady part of Kensington Gardens, and took her seat under a spreading tree, and waited, tapping her boot with the little gold-headed riding-whip.

At last her quick eye fell upon an approaching figure.

A man, past the prime of life—if such a man could be ever said to have a *prime*—with grey dashes in

hair and whiskers, and red dashes in what should have been the whites of his eyes. A man, tall and stout, dressed entirely in black, with rumpled in his waistcoat, and a velvet collar to his coat, and a tie fastened round his throat with a pin, with a large red stone in it, with yellow gloves—with the fingers too long, and a painfully glossy hat; altogether *not* the kind of man one would have imagined Mrs. Adair would be waiting for. She took in all the little peculiarities of his costume at a glance, and muttered to herself, "Worse and worse."

He came up and held out his hand to her, and she took it—unwillingly enough. As she withdrew her own, he saw her with her left hand, in which she held a handkerchief, make a movement as if she would have wiped some contaminating soil from the one he had just released; 'twas the action of a moment, but he saw it, and smiled, and pulled his long, badly-trimmed beard, and then stuck both hands into his trousers pockets and laughed, and finally sat himself down by her side, and said—

"Well, Bella; have you got me some money? I want it badly enough."

He called her "Bella" in a coarsely familiar way; and seeing she winced under it, he determined on calling her "Bella" again.

"I have not been able to procure you any yet," she answered, not turning her eyes upon him, though—she dared not let him see the look she felt was there. "Patience; you shall have some soon."

"Patience is a good thing; but money is better. You lied—not that *that's* anything new for *you*—when you said in your note you had 'obeyed my injunctions.' My injunctions—my *orders*—were that you should get

me more money; and those you haven't obeyed; now you do it soon."

"Patience!" she repeated; "I have obeyed them so far as telling Lewis—Mr. Gordon, that—that—what you told me—that Withers was dead."

"And did Lewis—Mr. Gordon, believe you, or did he know you too well?"

"I scarcely know yet; I am to meet him again to-night."

"Where?" (with an evil glance at her that made her start visibly).

"At the opera."

He relieved his mind with a light volley of oaths.

"So you've money to throw away on the opera, and yet you've none for my—for my necessities? There must be an end to this."

"What *am* I to do—what can I do?" said the woman, wildly; but the moment after the bright sunny smile played over her face, for a group passed, and she recognised and bowed to Mrs. and Miss Reeve and Lewis Gordon.

"Who are those people?"

"Slight acquaintances of mine."

"What is their name?"

"Grey—that is, the ladies are called Grey, and the gentleman's name is—let me think—oh! Holbrook."

"You are lying to me, I know you are," he said, calmly, "only I have no means of proving it. You have fine acquaintances in these days, Bella, and you don't want them to see me. Well, they're not my sort, *they're* not—I don't want to know 'em, *I* don't. Still, it's worth your while to keep me quiet, judging by your smart dress. I made myself smart to-day to meet you—now *you* pay for it."

"You drink and gamble more than ever," she almost sobbed. "I never can supply—well, I promise you shall have money either Monday or Tuesday, and then *will* you let me alone for a time?"

"Yes, I'll not bother you for a time," he responded; "and now I'm going. Come, shake hands, Bella; it's no use being squeamish about it—you must do it."

And again her slender, graceful hand was extended to meet his—the very opposite to her own.

"I am going to lean on them rails now, along with the other gentlemen what's got nothing to do and lots of money; and mind you bow to me, for I've one or two friends about, and I choose them to see a fine lady bowing to me."

"What's the use——" she began.

"Bless you!" interrupted the man, "*they won't know what you are.*"

"I'll confess everything to Lewis Gordon to-night, rather than be in that man's power any longer." She said so to herself when his last speech was ringing in her ears, as she sat watching his square lumbering form fading away amongst the trees. "I'll confess all to Lewis to-night." And she really meant it at the time.

The little bay was taken up and down the ride at a pace that forbade anything like singling out and bowing to acquaintances who might be leaning on the rails. Only once or twice, though; Mrs. Adair soon tired of the ride that morning; his head was turned homewards, and the Old Kent-road soon echoed to his flying hoofs.

That morning when he joined them, the luckless Lewis had suggested a walk instead of shopping.

Claire, fine, handsome, generous Claire, who had

forgiven him the little twinge of jealousy Mrs. Adair had caused her in the jeweller's shop that day, had acceded to his request; so out they all three went to Kensington Gardens.

Nothing more had been said about pretty Mrs. Adair, "Lewis's old friend," since Claire had asked, "Was she a widow?"

Lewis knew Claire too well to fancy her pining in secret over imaginary rivals and woes. He knew his fair widow friend had passed from her mind as a breath passes from off the surface of a mirror it has dimmed for a moment.

"We really *must* go home, Monday or Tuesday, Claire," Mrs. Reeve broke out with, after a long period of uninterrupted thought on her part; "we really *must*, or we never shall be ready."

Claire's answer was a bright smile and a shy half-glance at Lewis Gordon, by whose side she was walking.

His was a sudden flush over cheek and brow, and a low, quickly-suppressed spasmodic exclamation.

"I've left so much to do at the last," pursued Mrs. Reeve; "it's all very fine to say we've got everything—we haven't done so, and I know better—and I've plenty to do before the wedding-day."

"Would it not be well," Lewis put in, faintly, and knocking feebly at a pebble with his walking-stick, "to—to defer—that is to, I think, defer the—a—the day in fact?"

"Why, my goodness, no!" said Mrs. Reeve, earnestly. "Why, my dear boy, no! Bless you, *I* can get round in time"—("Can I, though?" thought poor Lewis)—"I've no doubt; it's my way to be over-anxious, I suppose. But don't fear; there shall be no deferring the day."

He was going soon—pity him—to wound that kind heart at the bidding of *Mrs. Adair*.

Claire had as kind a heart, but she had also clearer eyes than her mother ; her *thought*, when Lewis spoke, was to ask “ *Mr. Gordon’s* leave that the day might be deferred *for ever*.” But she looked at him, and saw in the face she loved so well, no mean fear, no sneaking consciousness, only a carking care that wrung her honest heart *more* for him than for herself, and her words were—

“ Yes, *Lewis* ; and you shall tell us *why* when you please.”

He was going—pity him—to bring tears of shame into those trustful eyes—to pale the delicate roses of those pure cheeks, at the bidding of the lady with the crimson rose—beautiful *Mrs. Adair*.

A moment after this they passed her, sitting under a shady tree with a dubious-looking friend, and her bright smile seemed like a taunt to him, and—woman has such a foreboding heart—to Claire also.

“ See, *Lewis*,” she said, in a whisper, “ what flashy friends that woman has. I felt sure the other day she wasn’t so very unexceptionable.”

Claire Reeve was a darling ; but she *could not* help saying that.

* * * *

The business of the opera had proceeded some way. Pretty Piccolomini had received her first shower of bouquets for the night, and bowed and smiled in her own irresistible way to the footlights in answer to the first burst of admiring applause, before *Mrs. Adair* turned round at the opening of the door of her box, and nodded a welcome to *Lewis Gordon*.

He was a clergyman, and might not wish to be seen

at such a worldly (to say the least of it) place ; *that* feeling would account for his placing himself as much in the background as possible.

Mrs. Adair's was an attractive box ; many were the glasses levelled at that beautiful woman with the lustrous hair and gleaming shoulders. The dark splendour of the former was brought out by the diamond star she wore on the left side of her head, fastening in a small ostrich feather ; and the latter were rendered whiter and softer by the folds of the velvet robe, which were artistically draped round, and secured in the centre by another star of brilliants.

She looked gloriously handsome as she turned round with her eager, flashing eyes to welcome him ; and *he* looked—well—far too handsome for her to carry out her resolve of the morning, and “confess everything.” That fled at the first glance ; she would not, she could not with her own hand loosen the chain which held—which might bind even—Lewis Gordon to her.

“Where is your friend of the morning, Mrs. Adair? I expected to see him with you.”

“Lewis ! don't make cruel, taunting speeches about that—that horrid man ; he has so much in his power.”

So he has, Mrs. Adair, but scarcely in the way you are going to imply.

She paused a moment after deprecating his sarcasm, and then added—

“He has the secret.”

“Has he ? Horrible !”

“Yes,” she replied, hastily, “he has the secret, and he'll blazon it out before the world unless you can find me the means of bribing him to silence.”

“But your end would be gained by his ‘blazoning it

out.' What false move are you trying to mislead me with now ?"

She looked pathetically into his face. "You think me such an enemy. Oh ! Lewis, *how* you wrong me ; have I not been quiet all these years ? But when I saw how matters stood with you and that girl"—("Call her Miss Reeve," said Lewis)—"wasn't it natural ? wasn't it *right* that I should speak ? Give me credit for wishing to act properly, and for loving you dearly still."

He doubted every other statement she made, but he believed her when she said "she dearly loved him ;" he thought—

"I wish she wasn't so confoundedly fond of me ; poor Bella !"

"Who is this man, Bella ?" he asked aloud : "and how comes he to know anything about it ; have *you* told him ? What is his name ?"

"His name"—she just paused a moment to think whether or not she should call him Smith—"is Dessanges."

"And what proof can you give me that he does know this secret ? What proof, in fact, that there is a secret to know ? You deceived me before, Bella—cruelly—wickedly ; I shall be slow to believe what will destroy every atom of my life's ~~happiness~~ ; and not of mine alone, but of one who is far dearer to me than life. I shall be slow to believe without *good* proof *now*, Bella."

He spoke quietly, but with so much force and determination, that it shook her a little ; but when he afterwards alluded to Claire Reeve—to his love for *her*—then she was relentless.

"Read that note," she said, handing him a dirty scrap of paper, containing these words :—

"If the money's not forthcoming by Tuesday, at the latest, I'll kill the goose with the golden eggs, by telling Mr. Gordon and every one else.

"S. DESSANGES."

"He thinks you don't know yet, and he means he'll tell you what *I have* told you already—that *he* is dead. Dessanges was his great friend, and saw him die. That's the power he has over me, Lewis ; for he knows I don't want to—to injure or annoy you by making all public. I am more careful of your feelings than of my own."

"I'll see this man," said Lewis, gloomily.

"Oh, Lewis, don't ! oh, Lewis, no !" she cried, in unfeigned alarm ; "all would be lost if you did. Give me money to bribe him, and don't attempt to see him yourself. Break off that engagement of yours, and I drop the request I made the other day. Stay—are you still living in the same parish with that Miss Reeve ?"

"Yes ; I am curate of the village."

"You shall have Ada, if you wish (she will be a reminder to him, she thought). What sum can you give me at once to quiet this man—a hundred ?"

"Yes ; I can spare it badly enough, but I'll send you the cheque on Monday morning. All shall be as you desire, Bella ; only for pity's sake keep it quiet—don't drive me too far ; I couldn't live under such disgrace."

The crimson deepened on her cheek as he said the last word, but whatever his meaning, she did not resent it ; she only said softly—

"You must let me see you sometimes, Lewis ; you must bring Ada to see me sometimes. What shall you give out that Ada is ?"

"I don't know yet," he replied. "I've not had time to think yet. I would give up this curacy, but it's a good one, and my funds being in a worse state than ever, I can't afford to give up a good curacy. You could not manage with less than I have allowed you heretofore, could you, Bella ?"

"No," she replied, decidedly. "No, she could not ;" and then she added, "I deserve some trifling reward for keeping silence, I think."

"I shall be obliged to remain where I am, then ; and you must not expect to see me often, for travelling expenses will be a consideration."

In his heart he felt a throb of joy that he had a plea for remaining in the same village with Claire Reeve—with "poor Claire."

"I shall stay in town all next week, Bella ; I'll fetch Ada on Saturday morning."

"When do those Reeves go ?" asked Mrs. Adair.

"On Monday I be—— What is the matter ?"

He might well ask the question ; she had shuddered and drawn back as if some blight had fallen on her. He advanced to the front of the box, and following the direction of her eyes, before her "Keep back" and grasp of the arm could save him, his own had met those of a man with yellow gloves on—the man he had seen her with in the morning.

"What are you afraid of ?" he asked, quietly.

"Nothing for myself," she answered, promptly ; "of much for *you*, if you meet that dreadful man !"

And again Lewis Gordon believed those eyes and that tender voice.

"Why, what harm *could* he do, Bella?"

"Don't test his power of doing harm, Lewis, for your own sake; promise me you will neither let him speak to you, nor read any letter he may get conveyed to you; will you?"

"You are foolishly nervous, Bella."

"I *am not*. Promise."

"Well, well, as you like."

"Promise."

"Very well, then, I promise."

Mrs. Adair heaved a huge sigh of relief at the unnamed danger (to Lewis, of course) being warded off for a time.

She trembled violently when, on leaving, she saw herself and Lewis watched by Dessanges, and insisted on taking Lewis back to his hotel in her own carriage.

"If he was only dead," she said to herself, after Lewis had been deposited; "if he was only dead, I could dare to go to Lewis and tell everything. I would win him back then."

Her aim had been, from that day on which she had first seen Lewis and Claire together, to separate them at once and for ever; and now her end was gained, she thought, and she was not much the happier for it.

"I thought that, in unquestioning belief, he would have accepted the fate I tried to worry him into," she said to herself; "but he is shrewder than he used to be, and yet a very child in my hands still. How he loves that girl, though; and why, I wonder? She seemed to me quiet and stupid, and not beautiful enough to counteract those drawbacks; and yet she has won *my* Lewis. He no longer thrills to my lightest word as he did when—when he was willing to throw friends, reputation, fortune, to the winds for my

sake. He has not asked a single question as to my life since *that* day; he has shown me that to him I am dead, but it shall not be so long. The game is in my hands, I *think*; but one false move, and I lose him for ever. Oh, for a prophetic soul to warn me how to act!"

CHAPTER III.

The venomous clamours of a jealous woman,
Poison more deadly than a mad dog's tooth.

"THE Reeves are home," said Mrs. Young to her daughters, two or three days after their return from that luckless visit to town. "The Reeves are home, I hear. Couldn't you girls go and call there? you'd see the fashions, and most likely hear when she's going to be married. I dare say it will be soon now."

Mrs. Young was the wife of the solicitor of Bassingtree, and was largely afflicted with curiosity. Emily, her eldest daughter, had been a handsome, showy girl ten or twelve years before. She was now a trifle worn and faded; baffled hopes and blighted aspirations had set their marks, in legible characters, on her face; she had been compelled to eat many mental crab-apples, and now she partook of their nature to a degree, and attempted to administer them to other people.

"We don't want to go to Claire Reeve for our fashions, thank goodness, mamma; and I am sure I care very little when she's to be married, or whether she's to be married at all."

Lewis Gordon had been one of her aspirations, therefore the flash, or rather vindictive sparkle, of her keen black eyes—had they ever softened to a real love-light?—had a meaning beyond her words to her mother and sister.

"Now really, Emily, considering your great friendship for Lewis Gordon, I should think you would feel sorry if she wasn't married at all; he is so deeply attached to her."

Julia Young, the speaker, was a fair, plump girl, who, in virtue of having light hair and pale blue eyes, had adopted a dove-like bearing and expression it was rather hard to keep up at all times. But she tried—before people—because she had got herself to believe that it was so very becoming; occasionally, though, she was a "peccant dove," especially to her sister.

"I have no 'great friendship,' for Mr. Gordon," replied her sister, angrily.

"Oh, haven't you? I beg your pardon, dear; it is some time since I heard you say you had—before his engagement, in fact."

"I know you want to curry favour with Claire Reeve," retorted Emily, sneeringly; "so I'll call there with you this afternoon. It's a pity you shouldn't have every opportunity; there's no saying what being considered a friend of the heiress's may do for you."

"It would be unfair *not* to give me every opportunity," said the gentle blonde; "you've had so many, dear, and nothing ever came of it. I may be more fortunate; and as to calling there with me this afternoon, do, if it's agreeable to yourself, but not else; I can go without you."

"Oh, you're old enough to go alone," said Miss Young, laughing far too heartily for it not to have cost a great effort to laugh at all. "Oh, you're old enough to go alone. I wonder you acknowledge that."

"A painful acknowledgment for *you* to hear, no doubt, as you are so much my senior."

"Girls, girls! don't quarrel so," said their mother. Poor woman! these disputes about their respective ages frequently made her wish they had never been born at all; but, as she sometimes remarked, "that couldn't be helped now."

"I think I shall call at the hall with you this afternoon."

"What a troop to go!" Miss Young remarked, discontentedly. "I can't bear so many going. Can't you put it off, mamma?"

"I wonder you don't marry, and so avoid these family calls, if you dislike them so much," said Julia.

"I might say the same to you."

"Oh, I never complain."

Those dove-like women are very aggravating; Emily Young, without being really cruelly disposed in general, could have strangled her sister with pleasure whenever they had been disputing for five minutes. "It wasn't," as she observed, "so much what Julia *said*, as what she meant and looked." And yet, amongst their acquaintances, Julia was always spoken of as "a good-hearted, amiable girl," and one "who had to put up with a great deal from her sister." Ah! outsiders, outsiders! how little do you know of what takes place within the ring! The favourite is not always the best horse, nor the winning horse either. Julia's feathers were never ruffled in public; and her voice was soft and low—before people; whereas Emily, who would know the full meaning, and feel the full force of some softly uttered speech that sounded harmless to the uninitiated, had been known, oh, fatal and not-to-be-got-over mistake, to "lose her temper;" or rather to exhibit, in one of its least agreeable phases, the one she possessed in reality; though I would rather have

had the elder sister for an enemy than the younger, and that, *not* because of any inferiority of intellect on her part.

"Here come the Youngs, mamma, the whole family; I wish they had not caught sight of me. Nuisance! But it's too late to avoid them now," said Claire Reeve, rising hastily from the seat she had occupied in idleness from the time she had left the luncheon-table till now, about three o'clock.

It was in one of the deep bay-windows of the nobly-proportioned, dark, gloomily-sombre to those who did not care for the place—sombrely-dear to those who did—drawing-room of Bassingtree Hall, that Claire, heiress of the place, had taken her seat. It looked out upon a fine expanse of lawn—almost a park; no gravelled walks of different hues, no brightly tinted flower-beds of stiff outline, broke the grand undulating sweep of grass. Light and shade there was plenty of—for the fine old trees of Bassingtree Hall had a county-wide reputation: to the right stretched away the avenue of oaks, and up this avenue, on this late August afternoon, walked the three ladies who had in the morning decided, in family conclave and quarrel, to "call upon the Reeves."

Claire was sitting before a huge piece of wool-work, and busily engaged thereon, when they entered the room, as if such a thing as sitting moodily looking out on falling leaves and moralising about fading hopes, was unknown to her.

"*How* you get on with it, to be sure, Miss Reeve (Claire had advanced about three stitches since the speaker looked at it last); *how* you work! I always say how much you do, and how industrious you are, considering—considering *what* you are you know. But

suppose there's a reason for finishing off this new piece of drawing-room furniture very soon, isn't there? How lovely it will look, to be sure."

Miss Julia Young smiled so sweetly that few people would have suspected how keenly she was watching the effect of her allusion to Claire's approaching marriage on her sister.

"Yes; I shall be very glad to get it done," answered Claire, trying to speak quite calmly, and driving herself wild by attempting to puzzle out whether or not "those people" could have "heard anything."

"I shall be glad to get it done; I am so tired of having it about; and mamma will like to have it made up before we fill the house at Christmas."

Ah! she'll want a little gaiety to console her for your——" began Julia; but she was interrupted by her sister saying,

"Did you enjoy your stay in London, Miss Reeve?"

"Yes, very—that is not much."

"Did you not, indeed? oh, I am very sorry to hear that!" said Julia, with a look of as much concern as if Claire Reeve's non-enjoyment of a visit to London would stop the progress of the world.

"We thought," she continued, "that you would kindly show us some of the pretty things you have brought down. Such an awkward time of year to get such an outfit as *you* want—summer fashions are old and winter ones are not brought over yet. How *did* you manage?"

"You appear to forget there is such a period as autumn," said Emily; "and yet one can't often accuse you of overlooking things in your calculations, Julia—to say nothing of autumn having a peculiar claim on your memory."

It was a cruel shot, an unsisterly shot, in fact. Some seasons ago, a hardly-hunted youth had been induced to *almost* allow the matrimonial noose to be slipped over his head by the fair Julia; *almost*, but not *quite*; and it was to the fact of his having drawn back and escaped into some unknown wilds that Miss Young now alluded.

It was a palpable blow. To resent it there would do no good, but by taking it with a seraphic smile, she could prove her superiority of disposition to her sister in the eyes of Claire Reeve; and she comforted herself with the reflection that she had three or four perfect cannon-balls in comparison to this, to favour that same sister with.

"Have you been walking at all to-day?" Claire asked, hoping to change the conversation.

"No," replied Julia; "I wanted to go down towards the village, just past Mr. Gordon's house; but Emily has such a dislike to that road—I suppose she has taken what we should call a surfeit, if it were anything to eat; for two years ago she was always there. Were you not, dear?"

Miss Young was pale with fury, and vouchsafed no answer.

"Well, girls!" struck in Mrs. Young, who had been carrying on a questioning conversation with Mrs. Reeve, "has Miss Reeve told you yet when it's to be?"

Claire had felt all along that it was coming to this, and she had decided that instead of descending to subterfuge or evasion, she would tell them once, just once—*ware* all questioning after that—the truth, that is, as far as she knew it herself.

She looked up bravely, and faced them all, her cheek

just going a shade paler as she spoke, but not a quiver of the eyelid—not a falter in the voice.

“Circumstances have arisen to put an end to the prospect of my being married to Mr. Gordon; what those circumstances are we neither of us intend mentioning. I must beg you not to refer to the subject again to either Mr. Gordon or myself.”

Her auditors almost gasped with astonishment; but there was that in her manner they did not care to brave. They contented themselves with making broken apologies, and then quickly brought their visit to a conclusion, in order that they might call at one or two other houses and spread the report—the report of such a charming bit of news—of the broken engagement.

There is no doubt about it; people—women especially—delight in talking and speculating about a broken troth. A little bit of mystery enhances its value amazingly. The broken or wounded heart is not thought about, though it's spoken of, for it sounds well to say, “Her heart is broken, poor thing; he's used her cruelly; not that *I* am surprised *at all* at the young man getting out of it. He never cared much about her, but she was blinded by vanity, and then, oh, *how* she did try to catch him! But I feel very much for her, for, of course, her prospects are blighted for ever. No young man would think of a girl that has been publicly spoken of. I feel very much for her indeed, poor thing!”

The position of a jilted young lady in the eyes of her own sex is much like that which King Cophetua's “Beggar Maid” would have occupied had the enamoured monarch neglected making his will and, dying, left her a jointureless widow. Having been raised from the

ranks, woe betide her if she is disgraced to them again.

Before nightfall, thanks to the indefatigable exertions of the Misses Young, a hundred crimes had been attributed to Lewis Gordon, and a hundred follies to poor Claire; and intense anxiety was felt by his loving flock to see how their pastor would deport himself on the Sunday.

You *may* stand a chance perhaps even now, Emily," kindly observed Julia to her sister, when they had retired for the night, and had been for more than an hour dissecting the skeleton Claire had given them. "I should try the Sunday-school again; it's a pity I bought blue velvet to make that handkerchief sachet for Claire Reeve; she wont want it now; and if it had been black I would have given it to you to make a sermon-cover for Mr. Gordon."

"If you can't find something more agreeable to talk about, you had better go to your own room, and leave me to the peaceable enjoyment of mine," said the elder sister, angrily, brushing out her thick dark hair, and tangling it in her over-energy.

"Good night, then," yawned Julia. "Sleep well; to-morrow is Sunday, and the sun comes straight down on your head in our pew. I hope you wont look yellow. Good night."

They had actually been little children together, and at the same mother's knee had knelt and said their little prayers.

"I wouldn't go, Claire; you don't look fit to go out, much less to go to church and sit through a long service; I would *not* go."

"Yes, I will, mamma," Claire replied, firmly. And

having no farther excuse for remaining longer at home if she meant to go to church at all—having fastened her gloves with as much careful precision as if they had been going to remain on her hands for all time, and looked for the fiftieth time at the bow of her bonnet-strings—Claire Reeve walked down to the little village church, and into her own pew.

She did not venture to glance at Lewis—his dearly-loved familiar voice agitated her too much—but after a time, when the prayers were well on, she looked round the little church.

The rector of the parish—a gouty pluralist—was always on the continent, parading his handsome daughter before the admiring eyes of German barons and Italian counts, so his pew had come to be considered the exclusive property of Mr. Gordon. None but the friends of Mr. Gordon ever sat there, and to-day it was occupied by a little fair-haired, blue-eyed child.

Poor Ada had been obliged to stand such a perfect artillery of eyes, that you would have imagined one pair more would have been scarcely noticed by her, but something in Claire Reeve's face attracted her regard, and after wistfully returning the lady's glance for a minute or two, she deliberately pushed open the door of the pew, and scandalized the congregation by making her way to the side of Claire.

Bewildered as she was—assailed by horrible doubts and fears as she was—Claire was not made of the stuff to resist such an appeal. At the first touch of that childish hand, her heart went out to little Ada with a feeling of love and pity; she could only clasp the tiny hand closer, closer in her own, for she felt that a word or a look now would unclothe the flood-gates, and upset

her hardly maintained equanimity; she judged by a sudden inflection of his voice, and judged rightly too, that Lewis Gordon *saw* and *felt* that little scene also.

The service over, she went out, and astonished everybody by waiting in the churchyard, holding little Ada by the hand till Lewis came out and joined them.

"This is my adopted daughter, Claire," he said, faintly colouring. "What a bold little lady she was to march out of the place I had put her in," he continued, bending down to caress the child. "What made you do it, Miss Ada? You have been troublesome to the lady."

"No, she has not. No! she never will be. Let her come to me if she likes. I suppose she is the child of some old friend?"

Claire looked up at him *so* honestly while she spoke.

"She is my adopted daughter, Claire." And Claire comprehended, from the repetition of that statement, that he cared not to be further questioned. They walked down to the churchyard gate together, the child, the only bond of union between them—between *them*—between those two who had been all-in-all to each other so long. When they reached the gate their paths were different; hers lay to the right, and Lewis's to the left; there was no further excuse for prolonging the interview.

"You are going home, I suppose?" said Lewis.

"I suppose so. Yes! let little Ada come to see me. Good-bye."

And then she walked home, feeling the landscape was reeling before her eyes.

"Did you see Lewis?" asked her mother.

"Yes! mamma, and a little child—a sweet little thing he has brought down with him; hush! mamma, not a word, his 'adopted daughter' he calls her. Mamma! Lewis, poor Lewis, looks worn and ill; let us be kind to the child."

Mrs. Reeve almost smothered her face in a handkerchief, but presently she looked up, and though she did not speak, Claire read no negative to her request in that kind motherly face. When she *did* speak after a long time, it was only to say, "Poor Lewis!"

That was all that was said about the advent of little Ada at Bassingtree Hall.

"Did you notice that child's eyes, Emily, and the colour of her hair?" asked Julia Young of her sister, as they sauntered slowly home, hoping Mr. Gordon would be compelled to overtake them.

"What child's eyes and hair?"

"Why, that child of Lewis Gordon's. I mean the child that sat in his pew, at least."

"No! What was the matter with her eyes and hair?"

"Nothing the matter with them, only they bore a most remarkable resemblance to the eyes and hair of our esteemed curate."

"How scandalous you are, Julia!"

"Oh! I didn't mean to shock you; it's accidental, no doubt. Wonderful child to single out Claire Reeve in the way she did. In time, I dare say Claire will relax and make it up with that lover of hers. What do you think?"

"You have no right, *I* think, to take it for granted that it's Miss Reeve who has broken it off; it's just as likely to be Mr. Gordon."

Emily was very angry at any one imagining it possible for any other woman to throw Lewis Gordon over ; she rather inclined to the opinion that everybody was moving heaven and earth to get him.

"Ah ! I never thought of that," replied her sister ; "but now you put it so forcibly before me, I shouldn't wonder if you are right ; he is probably just awaking to a sense of your charms and merits. The only wonder is, that he has been blind to them so long, for, I am sure, you have given him every opportunity of studying them. And he has broken off his engagement with Claire Reeve, the beautiful young heiress, for the sake of the mature Venus, who has sighed for him so long in vain."

"Julia, you are more insulting than I should have supposed it possible *even you* could be."

"We may as well walk faster, and not keep lunch waiting," said her sister, coolly, in answer to Emily's reproach ; "for Lewis Gordon evidently does not mean to overtake us. I wonder what he will call that child ?"

"Why — positively," continued the young lady, looking back over her shoulder, "if there isn't Claire Reeve standing at the gate talking to him."

"Well ; I call it shameful," her sister chimed in, an angry glow at Claire Reeve's degeneracy mounting to her cheek. "Well, I call it shameful. The idea ! If people *are* engaged, I like it to be a proper engagement ; and if they *are not*, they shouldn't behave as if they were ; I hate half measures. For my part, I should consider, if I had been engaged and it was broken off, that my character was gone for ever."

Now Miss Julia was in the position so feelingly and

strikingly painted by her sister ; that fact might have tipped her tongue with gall as she answered—

“ But as it is, no one has found the plum tempting enough.”

And then they went home, and discussed the merits of the sermon, and the appearance “of a child in Lewis Gordon’s pew,” and the extraordinary conduct of said Lewis Gordon and Miss Reeve, and a few other things that they felt called upon to talk about and arrange, with their mother.

Back—away from these scenes of rural purity and peace, away from green lanes, and country churches, and unsophisticated rustics—back to noisy, dusty, wicked London, where people plot, and plan, and envy and hate one another.

The time is evening ; the place is a large, comfortably, but not luxuriously furnished drawing-room, in a good-sized, substantial house, in the Regent’s-park—a house that did not represent the highest aristocracy, either from its position or its inward adornment, but that represented assured wealth, and a certain amount of refinement.

An old gentleman—a dear old gentleman—with white hair falling in a silver sheet on his coat collar behind, for which purpose it had entirely abdicated the front and crown of his head, a strongly-marked, but most benevolent, countenance, and a pair of keen bright blue eyes—sat in an easy-chair on one side of the fireplace, with a little reading-stand drawn up close, and the latest edition of the *Times* in his hand ; he was old Sir Michael Gordon, the rich retired banker, a Scotch baronet, master of the house, and father of our old friend Lewis.

At some little distance from him, but on the same side of the room, a lady—elderly, and clearly an invalid—reclined on a low couch ; a cashmere shawl was wrapped round her, concealing her figure entirely, but her face was visible, and it bore a sharp, pinched look of pain.

The invalid lady was Lady Gordon.

At a large round table, at some little distance, sat two girls, the elder about four or five-and-twenty and the younger about nineteen. The former had the tea-tray in front of her, and was employing herself at intervals in supplying the wants of the others, and in endeavouring to amuse, with her lively descriptions of people and things she had seen and heard of that day, the poor lady, whose knowledge of out-door life could only be gained in that way. She was tall, fair, and handsome, like her brother, but with more firmness and decision in her face than his could boast. Had she been a man, she would have been a far cleverer man than her brother; as it was, the difference in their educations had given him the advantage—at least so she was content to think ; indeed, the only delusion Miss Gordon laboured under was the profound admiration she felt for Lewis and the respect she entertained for his judgment on all subjects.

“Lewis might have come to say good-bye to us, I think,” Lady Gordon murmured, in a plaintive tone ; “it would not have taken so much of his time just to come and say good-bye ; there’s no knowing when he may come up again ; and Claire too. I own I *do* think it quite unkind of Claire not to have come. Why, she was never near us after the Friday, and they didn’t leave till Monday.”

"Oh, he will be up again soon, no doubt, mamma. There's no saying ever *why* people don't do such and such a thing, till you see them and have it all explained."

"Give me another cup of tea, Maggie. Lovely dresses Claire has got, to be sure!" the younger sister, Georgina, a girl of about Claire Reeve's own age, put in in one breath.

Georgina, familiarly Georgie, was a pretty, bright-looking girl, not so fair as her brother and sister. Even while she kept her head raised from the book that had been absorbing her all the evening, waiting for her tea to be handed to her, came a ring at the bell, and presently "Mrs. Adair" was announced, and before the eager "who is *she*?" that rose to all their lips could be uttered, a beautiful woman, with flashing dark eyes, and a crimson rose in her bonnet, and an indescribable atmosphere of grace and splendour hanging about her, was amongst them.

CHAPTER IV.

No friend, save resolution.

MRS. ADAIR had ventured into unknown regions, but as the soul of that mighty hunter of gorillas, Monsieur du Chaillu, rose freely "when he found himself in the forests of Central Africa, far from the help of white men," so did the soul of Mrs. Adair when the door was closed behind her, and she found herself advancing towards a family into whose midst she presently meant to throw a red-hot shell.

"An awkward time to disturb you, I fear," she said, in her richest, clearest, most carefully modulated tones, and smiling half-sadly, yet very sweetly, on the whole party, but especially on Lady Gordon; "but my business would admit of no delay. You will, I hope, forgive me."

Sir Michael had risen from his chair, and remained grasping the arm of it and the *Times* together in his right hand; he bowed and attempted to assure her of their free forgiveness for the interruption, and of his desire to be informed as to how he could assist her, "for I presume," the kind-hearted old gentleman went on, "that your business is with myself."

Pretty Mrs. Adair gave one keen glance round the circle that was unseen by them, and then she gave a

deprecating glance that *was* seen, as she intended it to be, and then she spoke—

“My mission I feel to be such an unpleasant one”—her auditors waxed curious—“that had I not been urged to it by a strong sense of duty to others, I could never have undertaken it; it is——” she paused a moment to bring an embroidered handkerchief to her eyes, “to put you in possession of some facts relating to your son.”

“Good Heavens! relating to Lewis!” said the father.

“Oh, dear, what *shall* I do? what *has* he done?” sobbed the mother.

“I am very sure that nothing ‘unpleasant’ can be related of my brother,” cried his eldest sister, who already felt violently antagonistic to the lady with the crimson rose.

“Do be seated; pray be seated, madam,” Sir Michael said, frowning with one eyebrow at his daughter for being so impetuous, and almost rude, to a stranger; and smiling with the other on the sweet agitated creature who looked beautifully embarrassed; “and be so good as to—to—that is to say, tell us what you were kind enough——”

“To hint about Lewis,” put in Maggie, angrily.

“Is he ill?” plained Lady Gordon, whose mind was slow to receive any other form of misery and unpleasantness. “Is he ill, or has he quarrelled with his rector?”

Mrs. Adair had to compress her rosy lips—the mother’s anxiety seemed so very ridiculous to her.

“Neither, dear madam,” she said, after a moment; “I greatly fear that what I have to say will agitate

you too much. *Have* you heard that your son is contemplating a marriage with a lady residing in the parish of which he is curate?"

She asked the question with a sudden alteration of manner; no longer trembling and agitated, but with stern "justice" written on every feature.

"We *have* heard it; we know it well," replied Sir Michael. "My son was free to choose, and it is our great happiness and pride that he has chosen an excellent and amiable young lady, whom we all love and esteem; surely you can have nothing to say about Miss Claire Reeve."

"Nothing of her—no, no—nothing; but, Sir Michael Gordon, your son was *not* free to choose; he was married seven years ago to *me*!"

She rose proudly, and faced them all firmly—not defiantly—as she threw her shell.

Sir Michael Gordon fell back in his chair—he had been standing all this time—as she said the words which led him to believe it possible, for the first time in his life, that one of his name and race—that a *Gordon*—could be aught but honourable.

"Oh! that heartless monster—to want to marry a married man," sobbed Lady Gordon.

"Whom do you mean, mamma? Claire? Really I think in this case the epithet belongs to Lewis," said Georgie, who was rather favourably impressed by the beauty and grace of the stranger.

"I don't doubt the epithet being deserved, but certainly not by either Claire or dear Lewis." Miss Gordon flashed an unmistakeably hostile glance at her unwelcome sister-in-law.

"I expected all this; I came prepared for contumely,

scorn, and unbelief," said the lady we have known as Mrs. Adair. "I felt sure your brother had kept you in ignorance of the tie which binds us, still I felt it to be my duty to come and try to save him by telling you all. Sir Michael, you must interfere. Miss Reeve ought to be informed *through you* of Lewis's marriage. I have suffered terribly," she went on with an hysterical sob, "but had I alone been concerned, I would not, since Lewis has ceased to love me, have betrayed his secret; but in justice to Miss Reeve, in justice to my child, in justice to Lewis even, I could keep silence no longer. I throw myself upon your mercy—if you receive—acknowledge—me, Lewis, no longer dreading your anger at his having married unknown to you, will return to that path of duty from which he has swerved. Sir Michael, you have the name of being an honourable, just, and upright man, can you be *that* to all the world, and remain deaf to the claims of your son's wife, the mother of your grandchild; no; in your face I read protection; I see your resolve to bring back my husband to me."

She read and saw nothing of the kind in Sir Michael's bewildered face; but she was down on her knees in a graceful attitude before he had time to utter a word, kissing his hands and damping them slightly with her tears. She was such a very lovely creature, with those wonderful eyes, and those pliant features, and that perfect little head of hers, that Sir Michael found himself saying "yes" to her request that "he would be a father to her;" and then she went to Lady Gordon and apologized so sweetly "for upsetting her so," that Lady Gordon began to think she would like her much better for a daughter-in-law than Claire Reeve, and

wished it was all settled, and all the "fuss was over," that this charming lady might "take the girls about."

Georgie, too, quite touched by her wonderful beauty and imaginary misfortunes, gave her the hand of friendship, and the promise of future partisanship. She had been very fond of Claire, but since it wasn't Claire, and evidently couldn't be Claire, she was very well pleased with the substitute. Mrs. Adair had carried the whole family—no, not quite the whole. Maggie eyed the raptures very coolly; it struck her that going down on her knees was "stagey" on the part of Mrs. Adair. If she was Lewis's wife, well and good; but she would wait for Lewis to tell her so himself before she signified her approval.

"You have not told us yet when and how Lewis came to marry you; nor why he left you. We know nothing of any of the circumstances, and it will be better to clear them up at once." Miss Gordon did not look like one who would be put off with a half account.

"I thought I mentioned," said Mrs. Adair, softly, "that we married seven years ago."

"Yes, you did; but where?"

"At Oxford; 'twas the year before he left college."

"How did he know you first?—how were you introduced?"

"I forget how or by whom," replied Mrs. Adair, waxing angry; "but we *were* introduced; so it matters little now, as to the how and by whom. I was a young widow, living in Oxford, and Lewis loved me, I suppose, and married me; and we should have been very happy, I have no doubt, but a report reached us that my first husband was still alive, and it caused

great misery, and we separated, and I've never seen him again, till a week or two ago I met him accidentally in a shop in London with the girl he was going to marry. I told him then that I had, since we parted, received authentic tidings of my first husband's death; but he doubts me—doubts me cruelly—because he wants to marry this girl; so, though he has consented, or affected to consent, to break off his engagement, he refuses to acknowledge me as his wife before the world; and it is to you, to his father, I come for redress for myself and for his child."

"This is a most painful business," said poor Sir Michael. "No doubt all this has arisen from a misapprehension. I am sure when Lewis knows your first husband is dead, he will make you all amends. By the bye, *what was* your first husband?"

"A private gentleman."

"How comes there to be any cloud as to his death? Were you not with him at the time?"

"No," she replied, faintly; "I was not."

"My dear lady," old Sir Michael spoke in the kindest way, but she saw there was a difficulty about humbugging him—"My dear lady, if I am to assist you—and if I find you deserving of it, I will do it heartily and well—there must be no half-confidences between us. *What* was the cause of your being absent from your husband's dying bed?"

"We were separated."

"Am I to understand that you were a divorced wife?"

"No," with a shudder; "I wish I had been."

"What, then? Nay, you must tell me."

"My first husband—his name was Withers—was—was outlawed."

"Good heavens ! I know she means transported !" almost shrieked Lady Gordon.

"Do you mean that, madam ?" said Sir Michael, the proud, pure Scotch blood rising in an angry flood to his brow ; "tell us—let us know the worst at once—at once."

"Lady Gordon is right, Sir Michael. As I am your daughter-in-law, I would have spared you the knowledge of what a shameful end my first husband came to. Do not seek to lift the veil further from his disgraceful life ; it is ended—I can swear it is ended ! I have good—the best proofs ; but while it lasted it was too infamously bad to bear looking back upon. Spare yourself—spare your family the disgrace which would overshadow all alike, if the life of the first husband of one who is now your son's wife were made public. Let me impress this caution upon you ; bury him and his fate in oblivion ; and you impress it upon Lewis ; I have taken every precaution myself. There is a man in England now, a man of the name of Dessanges, a convict friend of Withers's, he is always threatening, unless I keep him well supplied with money, that he will make all known, for he has found out that I have married Lewis, and to be revenged he would like to pain you all by letting the world know what Withers was. He has come back to this country, and the time of his penal servitude has not expired. To-morrow night he makes an attempt, in company with a gang, on a house on Blackheath. I dare not give him up—you must not appear in it—your name would give him the clue ; he would suspect

me of betraying him, and, out of malice, would make revelations that we should not like (clever woman, she identified herself with the family); but let some friend of yours give information to the police, and get him transported for life ; crush him, he is a devil."

It was finally arranged as she proposed, and contented with her evening's work, Mrs. Lewis Gordon returned to her own home.

"I care less about regaining Lewis than I do about destroying Dessanges," she murmured, as she sat alone that night. "He cannot suspect me—I am safe now. Oh! to-morrow night—I wish to-morrow night was come—and past."

It came and passed with safety to her ; the gang were taken in the act, not only of burglary, but a mild attempt to murder, and in little more than a month Mrs. Lewis Gordon, standing for the purpose on Greenwich Pier, with a thick Shetland veil over her face, had the pleasure of seeing the little steamer that was carrying them down the river, pass with a gang of convicts on board, and Dessanges was amongst them.

She was safe now—she said it to herself twenty times during the day. The man Dessanges was transported for life—she was safe.

"All danger to the name of Gordon is over, Sir Michael ; I can never be thankful enough for *that*," said the clever woman, who had detected *the* foible of the good Baronet. "All danger to the name of Gordon is over now, and now I throw myself upon your mercy. Lewis, in spite of the way in which he has treated me, is still so dear to me that I am capable of sacrificing myself for him ; *you* shall guide me. If you think, after all, that Lewis and I had better

remain apart—though it will break my heart to do so—I will consent; but it will be hard—harder than you can imagine.”

She was paler than usual, from intense anxiety, and altogether looked such a suffering miracle of beauty, that Sir Michael's answer was not much to be wondered at.

“My dear daughter, you are to return home with me, and I shall telegraph for your husband to-night. There, there, don't cry; all your troubles are over now, I hope.”

Great is luck!!!

The next day, at four o'clock, Lewis Gordon was, in obedience to a peremptory telegram, rushing into his father's house.

As he entered a vision of his sister Georgie, or rather of his sister Georgie's dress, caught his eye. On seeing him, from the drawing-room window, alight from the cab, that young lady had immediately imagined for herself business in a room on the opposite side of the hall, in order to gain a point of her own without disobeying orders.

“Stop, Georgie,” and though she affected to hasten her steps, she was overtaken, and her brother's arms were round her, and his kisses on her cheek.

“My dear Georgie, *is* anything serious the matter—my mother—tell me quickly—is my mother worse?”

Georgie hesitated, with a look of importance and mystery on her face that drove him some way on the road to madness, and then spoke so slowly and distinctly, that it sent him a little further

"Mamma is not *worse* exactly in health, Lewis, but fearfully agitated—we are all fearfully agitated," pursued the young lady, who certainly did not give one the idea of being so, but who deemed it proper to put in a claim to the family excitement. "We are all fearfully agitated, Lewis; but *I* am not to tell you anything. You are to see papa before we speak to you—only, of course, I couldn't help meeting you in the hall, you know; but you're to see papa *at once*."

"Where's Maggie?" asked Lewis, impatiently; "you are a little goose."

"I may be that, Master Lewis, but you wont find Maggie much better or wiser now—indeed you wont have the chance, for she's with mamma, who has been in hysterics all day, and Maggie is damping out rags to keep her head cool." And as she concluded her rapidly-enunciated sentence, Miss Georgie made a feint of moving on.

"A pretty state of things this!" exclaimed the exasperated Lewis; "my mother in fits, and Maggie spending the whole day in cooling her head. What *is* the matter?"

"You will hear soon enough; why do you not go to papa?" said Georgie, in that provokingly cool way which falls like oil on flames, on an already excited temper.

"Where is my father?"

"In the dining-room, Lewis, I hope"—but before she could finish her sentence, Lewis was standing before Sir Michael.

"My dear father, your message alarmed me fearfully—I so dreaded finding my mother worse; but I met Georgie in the hall, and she has relieved my mind

of *that* fear, but I cannot get a coherent account at all from her. What *is* the matter?"

Sir Michael stood up, and took infinite pains with his spectacles ; indeed, his great object in telegraphing for Lewis appeared to be, that that young man might see him put his spectacles into their sheath ; he wanted to be the stern sire for a little time, and he did not feel capable of performing the part perfectly with that handsome, eager, affectionate son standing just before him.

"I desired your sister not to have any communication with you, Lewis, until I had seen you ; I am very angry with Georgie for disregarding my injunctions."

"It was only for a moment, sir," Lewis explained, drawing himself up, and banishing all traces of affectionate eagerness from face and manner ; "and I have yet to learn why my sisters are forbidden to speak to me, and why—why I am greeted in this—this strangely unaccountable way."

"Lewis, circumstances have come to my knowledge, within the last few weeks, connected with your past life, which have pained me more than I can hope ever to make you understand ; have you any idea of *what* those circumstances are?"

The blood had surged up over Lewis Gordon's brow as his father spoke ; when he ceased, it went back, leaving him deadly pale ; his voice was hoarse as he said, "I have, sir ; tell me all you know, *then* I will take up the thread."

"Answer me one question, boy, before I go any further ; had you—on your soul, on *your honour*, answer me truly—the shadow of a suspicion, when you asked

Claire Reeve to be your wife, that another woman had a claim—a right—to that name?"

"On my honour, *No*."

Sir Michael Gordon drew a long breath of relief; "I am thankful for that, Lewis; but you know it now, and your engagement with Claire Reeve is——"

"Broken off," interrupted Lewis. "Father, how do you come to be in possession of these circumstances?"

"Your wife came to me—came to *me*—for that protection and countenance you refused her."

"Came to *you*—came *here*?"

"Yes, and told me everything; of that marriage at Oxford—of the report of her first husband's being alive—of your separation—of her finding that the report was false—of her telling you so—and, worst of all, most heartless, most cruel—of your refusing to believe her—refusing to acknowledge her as your wife."

"Has she told you 'all,' indeed, father—has she told you all, and do you still blame me?" Lewis Gordon asked the question sternly, and his father's wrath ran high at his apparent coldness.

"She has, sir; and do not call me 'father' until you tell me you are anxious and ready to repair the wrong you have done a beautiful and much injured woman."

"You think her that, Sir Michael? You could ill bear to hear that she was not worthy."

"It would kill me," said Sir Michael, "if I could believe it. Now that I have told you what I want you for, Lewis, I must ask you a question—why did you not confide your marriage to your family? Had you done so when that report reached you, I should have

taken measures to trace it to its source, and have saved these years of misery. Why did you keep it secret, Lewis?"

"Because——" began Lewis. "Why, I don't know. Did *you* tell everything to *your* father?"

"When I married your mother I was proud to introduce her to my family and friends," replied Sir Michael, with severe dignity.

Lewis stood thinking, with knitted brows, for a few moments, at last he said—

"You have seen her, sir—have seen Bella ; but my mother, my sisters, *they* know nothing about her?"

"She is here with them at this moment," replied Sir Michael, calmly.

"Is it possible?" cried Lewis, aloud. And then he thought "if matters have gone *so* far, rather than wound them all by letting them know, I will do even as my father wishes."

"Let me be here alone for an hour, Sir Michael, and then I will, if you please, go to *my* wife."

That hour he employed in writing to Claire Reeve ; when he had sealed it there were still above five minutes of the hour unexpired ; he sat with his face buried in his hands.

"That she-devil has managed cleverly to bring it to this ; my father would die under the knife if I applied it now, since my sisters are mixed up with her. Well, I give up my own hopes to save the ghost of our *family* honour—which will cease to be when my father dies."

He rose to his feet, and as he rose the door opened, and Sir Michael came in.

"Are you ready now, Lewis

"Yes—no, father ; let me speak to my sister for a moment, will you ?"

Sir Michael nodded assent, and withdrew ; presently Miss Gordon came down to her brother ; for when he said "my sister," Sir Michael well understood that "Maggie" was meant.

She came in eagerly, and going straight to him, took both his hands and kissed his brow, as she exclaimed, "Dear Lewis ! I am so glad you are come."

"Tell me, Maggie, as quickly as you can—for my father, who believes *me* inclined to play the villain, will be jealous of every moment we spend together—how far matters have gone—that is, *how* much is known to the world yet ; or has he, with more caution than he has evinced in any other part of the affair, kept it quiet ?"

"Oh, Lewis ! don't speak that way of papa," said Maggie, who wished with all her heart to think them *both* right. "He has been a little hastily imprudent, I fear ; he should have waited till he had seen you ; but he tells me that all—all—misunderstanding is cleared up now, and that you are going presently to see your wife."

"Hastily imprudent ! what has he done ?"

"Why, he has introduced her to several of our friends as your wife, and expressed sorrow that you should have kept it from us so long ; and this morning she said she wanted to go shopping, so he sent her in the carriage with Georgie, and all the things came home directed to 'Mrs. Lewis Gordon.'"

"He might have waited till I came ; he ought to have consulted me first," Lewis broke out, angrily. "He has left me no choice in treating me so like a boy."

"Oh, Lewis ! I fear—I fear——"

"What ?"

"That there was *other* cause than that report for your coolness and separation. Oh ! I am sorry for you, my dear—my dear !"

And Maggie fairly burst out crying, as she flung her arms round her brother's neck.

"Maggie ; as it must be, don't speak—don't *think* of that any more. Where is she ?"

"In mamma's room."

"Then I will go up."

And without another word Lewis Gordon walked up to meet *his wife*.

CHAPTER V.

To my early love—old things are best.

MRS. LEWIS GORDON had decided on meeting her husband in the presence of his mother ; she well knew that Lewis would stand anything rather than cause additional suffering and agitation to the poor invalid lady, and she knew that everything depended on that first meeting, so when Sir Michael Gordon went up to her and said, "My dear, Lewis is here—would you not like to see him by yourself first?"—she promptly replied, "No, indeed! dear Sir Michael; I am not ashamed nor afraid of anything he can say, and I would rather meet him in the presence of you all, that you may feel sure, whatever his decision be, that I used no hidden or underhand arguments to bring it about."

Soon they heard Lewis's step outside.

"There will be a scene," cried Lady Gordon.

"Trust *me*—trust my affection for *you* more than to fear *that*," Mrs. Lewis softly murmured, kneeling down by the side of the couch on which Lady Gordon lay, and busying herself in those little nameless attentions to a sick person which are not to be described, but which are so much *to them*.

This was the sight that greeted Lewis as he entered, looking as collected as if his life-interests were not so fearfully concerned :—his wife kneeling down, and tenderly attentive to his mother ; then he saw his mother's pale terrified face, and her imploring eyes met his, and he resolved in that moment to spare her aught that might pain. Then he bent down and kissed her, and pressed her hand affectionately, saying " Mother, *dear* mother, I so dreaded finding you worse ; thank God ! I was not summoned for *that*." And then he held out his hand to his still kneeling wife, and said, " Well, Isabel, I need not introduce you here, I find."

And she answered quietly, " No, Lewis ; forgive me for having done that for myself."

" Is that the only greeting you have for your wife, Lewis ?" asked his father sternly.

" Hush, sir. I have done what you asked me. I claim my right to do it in my own way ; Bella will forgive the raptures. I do not wish to cause my mother unnecessary agitation."

" Oh, dear ! I am so glad all the fuss is over," sighed poor Lady Gordon. " And have you brought up your little daughter, Lewis ? Ada her name is, Bella tells us. I want to see her."

" No. I left her at Bassingtree, but I shall send for her at once."

" Ah, I am so sorry you live so far off. We shall all miss Bella now. I shall dreadfully."

" I shall give up Bassingtree, mother ; so don't fret about losing us. I shall give up the Church, in fact."

Lady Gordon said she was " very glad ;" and Sir Michael did not care to ask him " why."

"Enclose that letter to Claire Reeve, Maggie," said Lewis, later in the day, giving her the one he had written, "and write to her yourself as kind—well, well, you know *how* I would have you write ; tell her all you know ; and, Maggie, I have left it open—there is nothing but what you *may* read—nothing but what all the world might read to Claire's honour and my own ; but they are the last private words I shall ever say or write to *her*."

Maggie did *not* read that letter.

"What has become of my old college companion, and, at one time, *friend*, Fanshawe ? Can you tell me ?"

Lewis Gordon asked the question of his wife as they sat together waiting for the others to come down to dinner that evening in the drawing-room—the room where she had thrown her shell.

"Do you mean Herbert Fanshawe ?"

"I knew but one."

"Well, he's dead. He went to Italy, and died there."

"I thought I could hear of him through you," Lewis said, looking at her fixedly. She met his gaze unshrinkingly as she replied—

"He went to Italy a month before—before we either of us left Oxford. You will gain nothing by sailing on that tack, Lewis."

"How pretty she is !" Georgie Gordon said to her sister, as they sat together, exchanging confidences that night in their mutual dressing-room, "isn't she, Maggie ? and how cool Lewis is, to be sure. He sat and talked to-night just as if it had all been as smooth as possible all along. He must be very much pleased to find what a favourite she is with papa and

mamma. I should like her to tell us all she has done during these long years she has been living in that solitary misery. How fond she must be of Lewis, to be sure !”

“I would not ask questions if I were you, Georgie. I think, from Lewis’s manner, he would like to live from this time only, and not ‘back’ at all ; and if that is the case, we have no business to try and lift the veil, you know. Poor Claire ! *she* will hear all this to-morrow.”

“I think,” said Georgie sententiously, “that Isabel is ever so much better suited to him than Claire. Of course Claire was a darling, didn’t I always say so now, Maggie ?” she added this hastily, as she read something like reproach in Maggie’s eyes.

“Yes, you did, Georgie ; none of us were apparently fonder of Claire than you were, therefore I am a little surprised at your being so well satisfied with *our* loss, and *hers*.”

“Well, Maggie, if I made myself miserable I couldn’t do any good—could I ? And I should only make Bella uncomfortable, and that would be wrong, now, wouldn’t it ? Besides, my liking Claire needn’t prevent my liking Bella, and being pleased with present and not to be altered arrangements, I suppose ? I am very glad Lewis is going to live near us ; they were talking of Bayswater to-night, and I am longing to see Ada.”

Ada came in a day or two, and the *happy* family party being complete, we may leave them and go back to Bassingtree.

When Claire Reeve received Lewis’s letter containing the whole fatal truth—the truth which was even

worse than the anticipation had been—she did not faint or go into hysterics, or, sobbing vehemently, announce her intention of starving herself to death; but a strong shiver passed over her frame, and she presently said, “Mamma! I am very ill; read *that*—Maggie’s letter, not Lewis’s, mamma. I would rather that no one read Lewis’s. She, too, felt that these were the last words that would ever come direct from Lewis’s heart to her own.

And Claire was very ill with a wasting fever upon her, that wore her away to a shadow—a fever of *the heart*; but people said “how well she bore it,” when it came to be known, and prophesied that the “heiress would soon console herself;” and strange as it may appear to those who know what women will do and dare on such occasions, no one ventured to allude, by word or look, to that page in the history of her life which she kept closed with a firm hand—at least, *before her*.

Soon Bassingtree Hall was shut up, and the mother and daughter went and travelled.

Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Gordon were quite settled in their house at Bayswater, and the beautiful woman was more beautiful than ever in her serene security. She consented to live very quietly for a time, and won old Sir Michael’s heart more entirely by her prominent domestic virtues; and little Ada, too, who was her father’s one comfort, was the pet and pride of the house in the Regent’s-park, where she was indulged, and spoiled, and dearly loved by them all.

Lewis had become indifferent to most things; he treated his wife with a studied grave politeness always,

but that was all ; not all his father's hints—and they were many—could win him to a softer bearing ; not all his mother's entreaties—and their name was legion—could bring him to say “ why ” he had altered thus from the warm-hearted, loving Lewis, to the cold, stiff Mr. Gordon.

“ I know you are not half as kind to her as you ought to be, Lewis,” she would say to him ; and Lewis would answer sadly—

“ I am sorry. Does she complain ? ”

And when he was certainly assured by his sisters—who dreaded mischief being made by these injudicious interferences, that she “ never said a word—it was only mamma's idea,” he would smile, and kiss his mother, and beg her not “ to distress herself ; not to think about them ; they were quite happy ; and it was all right.” And soon Lewis was more than ever careful not to “ distress his mother,” if he could avoid it, for she—the poor, weak, suffering woman, saw her hale, hearty-looking husband die before her ; and my hero was the head of the family, “ Sir Lewis Gordon.”

“ A message for you, sir,” said his servant, coming hurriedly into the drawing-room of the house at Bayswater, where Lewis and his wife and Ada were sitting one evening—“ a message for you, sir. Miss Gordon's love, and you must go directly.”

When Lewis got there, his father was dead.

“ What is the matter ? ” his wife asked lazily, as he entered the room late that night, looking pale as she had only once seen him look before, when he had met her that day in the shop with Claire—“ what is the matter ? you look as if you had found another wife.”

"Not so bad as that," Lewis answered, "but I have lost a father."

"Then I am 'Lady Gordon,'" she cried, exultingly; "speak, Lewis—is it true?"

"I should not joke on such a subject, madam ;" and disgusted with her heartlessness, he sought little Ada's couch, and over his sleeping child poured out his grief for his father's death. '

"She is lost to all womanly feeling, or she would have *expressed* grief at the death of one who had been such a friend to her."

"The close carriage is coming for you early, Bella ; my mother said she would send it."

"Oh, I am glad of that ; I shall have so much to get. I mean to have my mourning at Jay's, and it will take me some time to select all I want ; for unless mourning is carefully chosen, it is hideously unbecoming."

"But you must go to my mother first ; she said she wished to see you the first thing this morning, and would send the carriage ; so you must go there before you go shopping ; besides, they may want you to order their things too. Poor Maggie is in such a state of mind, that I am sure she is not fit to do anything for herself."

This conversation took place the morning after Sir Michael Gordon's death, as Sir Lewis and Lady Gordon sat at breakfast.

"Is the carriage hers to send, Sir Lewis ? It strikes me, unless it's especially willed to her, that the wife of the living baronet has more right to it than the dowager. However, I'll go."

"Yes, I desire that you will ; and be careful how

you behave. If I find that you wound them, no matter how lightly, you shall suffer for it; so, *Lady Gordon*, be careful. You have more cause than you imagine to lament my father's death."

"Lewis! Lewis! you frighten me; don't speak in that way; what do you mean?" She was so unfeignedly alarmed, that Lewis, who had held out the threat in idleness, was more than ever convinced that there was a cause. So Lady Gordon went to the house of mourning, and having a sword hanging over her head, she behaved like an angel to them all.

Sir Michael Gordon had been dead about six months. When coming down the steps of his club, Sir Lewis passed a young man who had just sprang from a private Hansom; he was passing on without recognising the stranger, but the latter turned to look at him, and then shouted out in a cheery voice—

"Lewis Gordon, have you forgotten me?"

"Why, it's Alfred Ferrars's voice," said Lewis; "but how in the world could you expect me to recognise 'little Alfred' in such ——." "a fine, handsome, young fellow as you?" he would have said had he finished the sentence which was in his mind.

"Ah! yes; grown a little since we parted; wonderful changes since then. I am—a—sorry to see you in black, though."

"I lost my father some few months since," said Lewis. And then hastening to change the subject, as men always will do, he added, "But what were you going to say about yourself?"

"I was going to tell you that I am a married man."

"You? Nonsense!"

"Fact, 'pon my honour; come and see my wife

Oh, I forgot, *that's* not the way to ask a stranger to be introduced to Mrs. Ferrars. Well, she has an 'open evening,' as she calls it, every Thursday. Will you come with Lady Gordon? That's the address."

And he handed Sir Lewis a card, which the latter took, promising to call.

"I shall not go with you, Lewis," said Lady Gordon, when the Thursday night came; "I am going to the opera."

"As you please," he said, carelessly. "Who goes with you, Lady Gordon?"

"Your sister Georgie."

He did not leave home till Ada was carried off to bed; then he went straight to Mrs. Ferrars's.

The announcement of his name was lost in the buzz of many voices as he entered the room where Mrs. Alfred Ferrars held court, so he stood unobserved for a moment, looking about for his host. As his eye travelled round the room it rested on a lady with her back to him, and her face turned partly round; in one glance he recognised the tall, well-developed form, and fair cheek, and long, upturned eyelash of Claire Reeve.

She was standing, the centre of a little knot of animated talkers; her low, clear tones reached his ears distinctly, in spite of the hum that was going on around, but the words he could not catch; he could hardly realize that he was once again in a room with Claire Reeve; he had almost turned to leave, hoping himself unseen, when his arm was touched by Alfred Ferrars.

"Delighted to see you, Sir Lewis; I am very sorry that Lady Gordon is not with you. Now, come, and I'll introduce you to my wife."

He said the words with such evident pride and pleasure—he was a very, very young husband—that Lewis suffered him to lead him on without thinking.

Presently he found himself close to the knot of which Claire Reeve was the centre. “Which can it be?” he thought, looking at the two only other ladies of the group—“which can it be?” One was a fair matron of about forty; the other a hard, handsome-featured woman, who might easily have been Alfred’s mother. But it was to neither of these two that Sir Lewis Gordon found himself bowing, as Alfred Ferrars introduced him to his wife. It was to Claire Reeve.

Her voice was so calm, that it steadied Lewis’s nerves as she welcomed him, remarking—

“You were not prepared to meet me, Sir Lewis. I *suppose* Alfred had not told you, at least?”

“No,” replied Ferrars; “did you know each other before? How was I to know that? How jolly, though!”

Very jolly for Lewis, who felt as if shame and confusion were covering him with a mantle visible to the eyes of all.

“Yes,” said Claire, “we are old friends. Excuse me now; there are a great many strangers in the room to-night; but let me find you presently for a quiet chat.”

By-and-bye she came to him as she had promised, and sitting down by her side, after inquiring for “Lady Gordon” with conventional civility, and for little Ada very kindly indeed, she said—

“There is one subject I will mention now at once, and then we will never speak of it again. After that

—that letter.” She looked into his eyes as she said it, and her husband might have been by to see that glance. “After that letter I was very unhappy for a long time; more so even when I heard from those who saw you sometimes, that you were not as happy as I could have wished with your wife. I feared so that lingering regrets—thoughts of what *might* have been—were interfering with your present duty. I judged you rightly, I am sure, when I thought that you would be happier when you knew I was so. I tell you that now, Lewis; I tell you that honestly. I *am* a happy wife now, *far* happier than when first I married Alfred Ferrars.”

She waited eagerly for his answer, and he hesitated to give it, because he knew what it ought to have been, and he could not, poor fellow, bring himself at once to say that he was “glad” that she had found happiness with another.

“Alfred Ferrars deserves it, I’ve no doubt,” he said at last. “He was always a good fellow.”

Claire looked disappointed; she did not know *all* Lewis had to endure, and she was vexed that he had not taken her confidence in a better spirit.

“How is your mother? Is she here?”

“No; she’s at Bassingtree. We go down in a little time. She is quite well, thank you.”

And then they found they had no more to say to each other—so many subjects were “best avoided.”

Sir Lewis Gordon knew that he had not the shadow of a right to feel angry, or *sorry* even, that Claire had married. He knew—or at least he felt pretty sure—that after that unpleasant affair got talked about, Claire must have had a great deal to put up with

which must have been exquisitely painful to her, and which now, as a married woman, she would not be liable to. In one thing—and he little knew how much that *one thing* had weighed with her—Claire felt far happier than before her marriage. No one *now* thought of blaming Lewis to her; and before, little pebbles of censure and high-minded moral blame were being constantly flung at him. But he did not know all this, and he could not get himself to feel other than angry and sorry.

CHAPTER VI.

Oh ! heartfelt raptures—bliss beyond compare.

A LONG, comparatively low room, for that lofty London house, with plenty of light coming in at the well-curtained windows, and a cozy fire burning in the wide luxurious grate, a round table drawn rather nearer to the fire than the centre of the room, set out for two, and looking almost dazzling with its silver service and spotless cloth ; on the fender, airing itself for the master of the house, a damp, uncut copy of the *Times*, and on the hearth-rug a white kitten and a child.

The room looked the very head-quarters of comfort and domestic happiness.

“Papa’s a long time coming,” said little Ada at last, after having exhausted her ingenuity in twisting the white kitten into all kinds of bows and knots.

“I wish he would come, Topsy.” And she diversified the proceedings by placing Topsy on the table, in order to enjoy the spectacle of that conscientious cat threading her way through the mazes of the breakfast service and viands ; but Topsy, who did not often find herself at large in such a land of plenty, got out

of her young mistress's reach, and throwing conscience to the winds, acted wisely, but not well, by dipping her little pink tongue into the cream-jug.

"Topsy, come away, do!" cried Ada in an agony. But Topsy would only blink her mild greyish-green eyes and lap without ceasing.

Ada stretched out as far as she could, but her arms were not elastic, and the kitten, who had measured her distance well, simply drooped the ear nearest to her mistress, and continued undisturbed.

"I must get a hassock. Oh! you horrid wretch."

Just then the door opened, and Sir Lewis came in. He always liked to find his little daughter there to receive him.

"What's the matter, pet? Hallo, Miss Topsy, that wont do," he cried, lifting Topsy up and depositing her on the hearthrug, where she at once commenced licking her paws, evidently ranking cleanliness next to cream in her list of luxuries.

"How did she get up, Ada?"

"I put her there, papa; not to eat anything, you know, but just to walk about among the plates and things till you came down; and then I could not catch her. You're not angry, papa?"

"With whom, Ada—Topsy or you?"

"Oh! not with Topsy, papa; and I don't think you are with me either. Here's your paper, papa, as dry as it can be."

"That's a quality it possesses too often to be pleasant, Ada," Sir Lewis replied, laughing, and taking up his child instead of the paper she proffered. But Ada did not smile in reply: she was far too intelligent to laugh at a joke she did not understand,

and the inconsistency of the statement struck upon her sense of justice.

"You are often angry because it's damp, papa," she said gravely at last ; "and to-day I held it close to the fire myself, and now you say it's often too dry."

"So it is dry—stupid, you know."

"Oh, yes !" cried Ada, heartily ; "I know now, so you won't want to read it. Sit down on the rug, papa, and you'll see how Topsy jumps. I'll put her on your shoulder."

When Lady Gordon came down, shrieks of laughter saluted her ears. There on the hearthrug sat the grave baronet, with the kitten on his shoulder peering over and balancing the advantages in favour of the jump against those to be gained by remaining where she was, while Ada stood by, clapping her hands and indulging in various joyous outbursts of spirits.

He rose when he saw Lady Gordon, and placed a chair for her. He never omitted these acts of politeness to his wife.

"Good morning, Sir Lewis. Ada, you're so noisy you must go away. Take that horrid kitten, and go up to my room."

Lady Gordon seemed rather cross, to tell the truth, as she leant back in the low easy-chair, and leisurely sipped her tea. There was the shadow of a frown on her forehead, and the eyes which were bent on her husband, who had taken up the paper and so was unconscious of the fact, were not exactly "mild."

"How did you enjoy yourself last night, Sir Lewis?"

"Enjoy myself!" bringing the *Times* with a jerk a little closer to his face, and causing that "mighty organ" to crack vindictively—"enjoy myself! You ask the question as if I were a young girl just returned from some stupid ball. Enjoy myself!"

"And you answer the question much as that same young girl might do if at the stupid ball she had met with some old love who had slighted her or married some one else."

Sir Lewis Gordon, in order to show that he had not heard a word of this speech, conveyed an elaborate and altogether impossible expression of interest in what he was reading into his face.

"What was this bride like? Do you think I shall find her worth cultivating? Would you advise me to call?"

"No; that is, I don't fancy you would care—that is, they are going out of town soon."

He had a strong disinclination to talk about Claire to Lady Gordon.

"Curious! I remember you once made the very same remark about some one else, but then you had a reason for not wishing to introduce me. Do you recollect?—'twas Miss Reeve, that day I met you all in the shop. What is Mrs. Alfred Ferrars like?"

"I really can't undertake to describe her."

"Now that's singular. So she *really* and truly made no impression upon you? Who was she?"

"If you want to find out, you had better ask Alfred Ferrars himself."

"Nay; I rather fancy you can tell me more about her than he can."

"What do you mean?" he said, throwing down the

paper, and rather fiercely breaking up some very crisp toast.

"You might as well have told me at once that it was none other than Claire Reeve that you met last night as Mrs. Alfred Ferrars."

"You knew it already it seems," he replied calmly. "Besides, Lady Gordon, I do not wish to talk about *her* to *you*."

"She is too good, too pure, that marble statue, I suppose?"

She spoke angrily and bitterly, and her anger and bitterness were not decreased as he answered—

"She is no marble statue, but a good pure woman."

"So good and pure as she is, I wonder at her trying to get *you* to her house."

"She did not know I was going."

"She *did*. Your sister Georgie saw her yesterday morning, and told her you were going, and she was 'glad,' she said; and Georgie offered to tell you and prevent your meeting, and she would not hear of it. Don't imagine the fact causes me a moment's uneasiness; I only mention it to show to you that the words will be wasted which you may employ in striving to assure me that Claire is more angel than woman."

"And do you think, Lady Gordon, that I *could* care to talk to you about things which you cannot understand?"

"With all my faults, I am not stupid," she rejoined, wheeling her chair round, and placing her pretty little slippered feet upon the fender. The face that was turned up to meet his gaze had never, even in *his eyes*, been more dazzlingly beautiful than now. Lewis Gordon must have been sorely tried by that woman

or he could never have replied to the last part of her sentence.

What are these things :—

Man's honour and woman's virtue ?

She did not reply or look overwhelmed with shame and agony when those words fell from her husband's lips. She just compressed her rosy mouth a little, and clasped the arms of the chair on which she was sitting, until the blue veins stood up like cords on the backs of her delicate hands. At last a sound like a gasping sigh caught his ear, and he, feeling that he had said the most cruel thing he could, no matter how deserved, pitied her, thinking he had wounded a little too deeply the woman who bore his name. So he looked at her almost kindly as he said, "Isabel, such topics are best avoided by us. I forgive you for what made me utter it—you, in turn, must forgive that speech of mine."

He did not wait for her answer ; indeed she did not know that any was required of her ; the sound, but not the sense of his last words had fallen on her ears ; she scarcely noticed his quitting the room, her mind was so busy forming new plans—she always *would* be planning—plans of revenge. She determined that Claire Reeve (she did not think of her as Mrs. Ferrars) should not *always* hold her head so high before the world.

It was long past her usual time of going out before she rose from that chair. How many times the fire had been replenished she did not know, for, as the servant who performed that duty remarked, in the easy unconstraint of the servants'-hall, "My lady had

the blue-devils this morning, and sat looking at nothing as if it was master!" When she did rise from her chair it was to order the carriage, to go and call upon Mrs. Alfred Ferrars.

When it was known at Bassingtree on Mrs. Reeve's return *alone* that Claire had married, of course a great many things were said about it by her friends and acquaintances, that the mother did not hear. But one thing she did—she couldn't well help it, in fact, for it was said to her by the young lady herself—and *that* was, that Miss Julia Young would find it very convenient if Mrs. Alfred Ferrars, of whom she had always been so fond, could receive her in her town-house for a few days. She took good care when she made her request to be unaccompanied by her sister, for she knew that she was obliged to go to London on business, and that she should be compelled to trust her youth and innocence in some hotel or boarding-house *alone* if Mrs. Ferrars would not be able to receive her. Of the existence of some much older, but East-end friends, who would only be too happy to take in the daughter of their very useful country acquaintance and fifteenth cousin, Julia did not want to be reminded, and did not wish to have anything to do with these worthy people. Had it involved the necessity of going to their house, I am not at all sure that she would not have found her "business" could be put off altogether.

"I am writing to my daughter now, and I'll mention it to her," Mrs. Reeve said, when Julia made her request. "When do you think of going up?"

"Whenever it suits Mrs. Ferrars," answered the too pliant Julia.

"Oh! but I thought you said—business."

"Ah! yes, to be sure. But a day or two sooner or later wont make much difference to me."

"Well, I'll mention it, my dear." And the result of its being mentioned was, that in a few days Julia was being cordially welcomed by her old acquaintance, Claire, to the home of the latter. Cordially welcomed. Not that Claire had ever cared much about her, but still she felt happy in doing a service, however slight, to one whom she had no cause to regard in any other than a friendly light.

"That Miss Young is rather a pretty girl, Claire," Alfred Ferrars said to his wife, the morning after Julia's arrival; "a quiet little thing, too. How long is she going to stay?"

"Well, I don't know, Alfred; I've not had much time to speak to her yet, you see. Those people took up my attention last night. I am afraid she found it rather dull; they were all strangers to her, and she's such a quiet, gentle girl, that she never claims attention, as her sister Emily—I can't bear Emily—would do."

"She must have known Gordon when he was curate at your place. Why didn't she talk to him?"

"Oh! she didn't see him, unfortunately. Last night, when I was talking to her, after they all left, I mentioned his being here, and she was surprised at it; so I suppose she did not see him."

"How Gordon's altered!" Alfred Ferrars went on; "he looks as glum as if he was a poor curate on a hundred a-year and no expectations, instead of being a wealthy baronet with the handsomest wife in London—at least people tell me she is. Have you ever seen her, Claire?"

"Yes—once."

"Only once—oh, ah! though, I forgot; there was some story, wasn't there, about his having been married a long time before it came out? What is she like? Did he raise her from the ranks? Was that the reason he kept it so quiet?"

"I should think not, Alfred. She struck me—I only saw her once—I remember, a very hurried interview—(and Claire's heart beat quicker as she remembered the events that were born of that day)—but she struck me as being a very exigent woman indeed. We are speaking of Lady Gordon," she continued, holding out her hand, as Julia Young entered the room; "Sir Lewis was here last night. You did not see him."

"Was here! no. And she too?"

"No. Lady Gordon did not come. Do you know her at all?"

"No, I do not," answered Miss Julia. "Do you?"

Mrs. Alfred Ferrars almost blushed as she replied, "No, she had not the pleasure."

"I wonder if he knows anything about that affair?" pondered Julia, gazing abstractedly on the open countenance of her young host, "I wonder if he does." But she was afraid of putting any question that might lead, not only to her knowing whether he possessed such knowledge, but also to unpleasant consequences, such as Claire giving her to understand that it would be well for her to retire once more into the rural districts before she had enjoyed any of the pleasures of the town. Yet still, as she passively bit the toast Alfred handed her, and drank the tea Claire prepared for her, she thought to herself, "I wonder *does* he know?"

"How sensibly you have acted—you and your husband, I mean—in being friendly with Sir Lewis Gordon, and letting by-gones be by-gones."

Miss Julia Young broke a rather oppressive silence, into which they had fallen after luncheon and Alfred Ferrars's departure for his canter in the park, with the above remark. Claire simply replied, "You think so?"

"Oh! yes, decidedly. And it must prove so satisfactorily to Mr. Ferrars that you have almost forgotten the past; or, at any rate, that you are perfectly contented with the present."

"I think Mr. Ferrars was satisfied of that before."

"Oh, no doubt, no doubt. What are your plans for to-day?"

Julia came out of the encounter defeated this time. Carefully and judiciously as she had introduced the topic, she had not learnt what she wanted to learn, and she felt as if Mrs. Ferrars were defrauding her of her rights in keeping the knowledge of whether she had informed her husband fully on a subject which concerned herself alone, from her. It is always the people to whom it matters least who are the most anxious to be posted up in every particular relating to you. And if you want to know anything against some one who is very dear to you, go to some mutual friend, who would not hold up a finger to save either one of you from death or dishonour, and you shall hear it. Julia Young was aiming at nothing; she was void of plans, and yet she felt a burning desire to inform, or cause Alfred Ferrars to be informed, of the fact of his wife having at one time been engaged to, and on the point of marrying a man—another man—whom she

dearly loved. And she felt angry at Claire for not telling her whether or not, in case of her succeeding in giving the information, she would be the first in the field. Had she been in power instead of Claire, she would have made Claire feel how very reprehensible her conduct was. *That* woman makes an enemy, who lets another of her sex imagine she has "a secret," and does not in the same moment confide it to her.

Julia Young had asked what were the plans for the day, and Mrs. Ferrars's answer was—

"Unless you care to go anywhere particularly, I think we'll stay in. I have not a close carriage yet, only a small park phaeton, in which I myself drive a pair of the prettiest ponies in London. But it's so cold to-day that my hands will perish. But you shall judge of their merits to-morrow."

"What colour are they, dear?" asked Julia, evincing at once the deepest interest in the ponies of her hostess.

"Bay. That bay that clips mouse-colour, you know."

"Yes, I know it; the same colour as the one Mr. Gordon gave you when he *was* Mr. Gordon, for your little pony-gig at home."

"Exactly the same colour," replied Mrs. Ferrars, calmly; "it's my favourite colour. What a good memory you have."

And then the two ladies returned to the perusal of their books, and continued in silence almost until the door was thrown open, and Lady Gordon was announced.

She came sweeping in; her black grounded, jewelled, spotted silk heavily trailing on the floor behind her, and her splendid, queenlike figure shown off by the

cut of the long black velvet cloak. As she held out her small, beautifully-formed hand, Claire recognised, almost with a shudder, the silver-grey tint that had always, since *that* day, seemed so odious to her ; and her eyes, on travelling up to her visitor's head, rested on precisely the same crimson rose. Of course it was not the same bonnet—she hadn't the excuse of economy. Could it have been to have that rose put in, and so recal, by its sight, old memories to her rival, that Lady Gordon had checked her carriage at “Eagle's” door?

CHAPTER VII.

Is there a man, whose judgment clear,
 Can others teach the course to steer,
 Yet runs himself life's mad career,
 Wild as the wave ?
 Here pause, and through the starting tear
 Survey this grave.

"MY husband wished me to come last night, and I regretted, more than I can express, that I was unable to accompany him," said Lady Gordon, still holding Claire's hand with an affectation of friendly frankness that made Claire wish to beat her, and feel ashamed of herself at the same time for wishing it.

"You see," Lady Gordon continued, "now I know on *whom* I am to call, I have lost no time in calling."

"You are very kind," said Mrs. Ferrars. "How is your little girl—Ada her name is, I think?"

"Very well, I believe; but you should really ask Sir Lewis about Ada; I do not affect to be the 'model mother.' But as to Sir Lewis, I believe he considers those his happiest hours which he spends in the nursery with Ada."

"Poor fellow," thought and *looked* Claire. And Lady Gordon's end was gained. She wished Claire to look upon Sir Lewis as a neglected husband—a man thrown upon the love of his child alone.

"I wonder who this girl with the colourless eyes is?" she thought, glancing at Julia Young—"cousin or

something of that sort ; not much like her, certainly—for this Claire is perfectly lovely ; or sister-in-law, perhaps ; she's in the way now—but that, as I know to my cost with the precious Maggie, is often the case with sisters-in-law."

"Do you not find it cold?" asked Claire ; "we gave up the idea—at least, my friend Miss Young very kindly gave up the idea to please me—of going out, because I fancied we should find it so cold in an open phaeton. I was sorry for it too, as her time in London is but short."

"Did you come from the country recently?" asked Lady Gordon, smiling sweetly ; "from any part of it that I know, I wonder?"

"From Bassingtree. I came from Bassingtree yesterday ; you may have heard Mr.—*I beg* your pardon—Sir Lewis Gordon mention it ; it was Mrs. Ferrars's home before she married."

Lady Gordon had "frequently heard Sir Lewis mention both Bassingtree and Miss Young. Would not the latter do her the pleasure of calling upon her before she left town?"

Miss Julia Young, in a highly-gratified frame of mind, promised to do so ; and then Lady Gordon turned from her, and forgot her existence in a conversation, which lasted full five minutes, with Mrs. Alfred Ferrars ; a short conversation, but long enough for Claire to discover that Lady Gordon was a cold wife and mother. "Circumstances parted us so long," she said, as she held Claire's hand at parting, "that it was scarcely to be expected that we could be much to each other when we met again ;" and "oh !" Claire thought, "how *could* that woman say that to me !"

If a woman looks well nowhere else, she generally looks well on horseback ; it is, without any exception, the most "becoming position" a woman—a plain woman even—can occupy in the world. There is no dress to equal the riding-habit ; crinoline has done away with classical elegance, and I think we must all allow that the richest robe, *without* crinoline, hangs ungracefully. The long, straight, up-and-down look is frightful ; it does in marble, where a curve—physically possible—can be given to the figure, but in the flesh I would have the garments *not* to cling like cerements.

In the riding-habit, however, classical elegance is retained. That long, full, sweep away from the slender waist is inimitable ; it renders even a plain woman, as I said before, presentable.

Lady Gordon was just turning into the park, on her handsome bay, at a trot—a long trot the little bay had, and he pulled just enough to steady her—as her husband and two or three of his friends were leaving it ; one of them turned round, with his hand on his horse's haunch, to look after the supple figure that had just bent in acknowledging them.

"Splendidly she rides, Gordon ; lucky fellow you are to get such a horse as that too ; he's out and out, the best lady's horse in town ; where did you get him ? I've only seen one horse to equal him, as far as suiting a lady is concerned."

"I did not give him to Lady Gordon ; I don't know where she got him ; saw him advertised, I believe, and liked the description of his 'long tail and mane,' bought him for possessing them ; and, for a wonder, found him a thoroughly nice horse. Did you say you knew a horse that would match him ? I wish you'd tell me where, and try to negotiate a bargain for me ;

for I intend my little girl to ride soon, and I should like to give her as good a mount as her mother's."

"I am afraid I can't oblige you, though," replied his friend, "for the horse I am speaking about I've lost sight of for years ; it belonged to a man of the name of Fanshawe when I knew it ; he never rode it himself, for he was a heavy-weight."

"Was he?" replied Sir Lewis, coolly. "Well, as you say, as you can't put your hand on the horse, there's no use in talking about it. Good morning."

How well she looked, to be sure ; blooming, beautiful, brilliant, happy. Yes, happy ; for her memory for things that had been—provided those things were unpleasant—was bad. She thought little of a certain stout, lumbering figure, surmounted by a set of badly-defined features, with whom she had once held converse, not far from where her horse's hoofs now came down, with such matchless precision, in his long pulling trot—*once* there, and oh ! how many times besides in other places. She thought little of that man who was now in a far-off land, expiating whatever crimes he might have been guilty of in hard, degrading toil ; he was coarse, vile, and low ; she might—delicate, beautiful, refined as she was—be excused for forgetting *him*. But she thought even less of one who was neither vile, nor coarse, nor low ; of one whose glorious beauty was not inferior to her own ; whose intellect was far higher, whose heart was far nobler, and who had been content to lay the wealth of all at her feet ; who had never looked into her flashing orbs with his own tender, grave, turquoise-coloured eyes but with the most passionate love for her ; whose only fault had been, in fact, that he had too well loved a worthless woman, and whose early death might surely

have sanctified his memory in that woman's heart. She thought even less of him, as sitting well back on the horse Sir Lewis Gordon had never given her, the little bay that matched a horse *Fanshawe* had once possessed, she returned the bows of admiring acquaintances. Why should she remember any of these things? Was she not "Lady Gordon?" And what could Lady Gordon have in common with such scum of the earth as a convict? And why should a beautiful woman of fashion trouble her head about a sentimental boy who had died long ago—died of a heart wound that he got one day? Think of him! nonsense! If his grave had been in her path, she would have put the little bay at it to show her friends in the ride how well she could sit the leap, or clattered over it even, unless the bay chanced to have a better memory, and bucked it, which he would have done if he was half the horse he looked.

But the grave which the little bay might have bucked did *not* lay in her path; it lay far away in a fairer, gentler land than ours; and now, as Lady Gordon trotted, warmly dressed, across some straggling beams, a warm, kind sun played lovingly over Herbert Fanshawe's grave.

An English home had been plunged in deepest woe when the news reached it that *that* grave had been dug. A father mourned that his son, his hope, his heir, was gone; and a mother broke her heart; and sisters sobbed and said to one another, "Poor Herbert!—to think that he should have died there *alone*;" and the poor mother told, "how she always feared he was consumptive," and wept and told it again. They never knew what a stab that poor boy had received—they never knew that he did not "die alone"—they

never knew that another had shared with them his last thoughts, and made those last thoughts agony. They always spoke of him as of one who had left this life before he well knew what life was, little imagining how much he had lived through before he had bent that fair chestnut-curved head and closed those turquoise eyes for ever ; and well for them that they did not know it ; that they could think of him as the merry boy, untroubled and unsullied by passion—as they had seen him last—not as the man over whom the storm of passion had passed, blighting as it passed ; who had been a toy in the hands of a woman he adored, and whose life that woman had sacrificed. It was well they could not know all this, it would have sadly disturbed their thoughts of that far-off grave under the southern sun.

Did Lady Gordon ever see, in her dreams, a picture of a fair chestnut-curved man—scarcely a man yet—with tender eyes, running a beautiful horse up and down a lawn before the eyes of a still more beautiful woman ? Did she ever hear, in her dreams, the words with which that same young fair man presented it to the lady ; or had she a sound digestion, and so slept without dreaming ? The latter, I am inclined to think. *Had* she dreamt such things, she surely could not have risen in the morning with that clear unruffled brow, and those blooming roses in her cheeks ; for I will do her all justice—she never, in the earliest morning even, looked anything but fresh ; she could stand any light, and was not open to having a whole evening spoilt by being injudiciously placed. She was, if possible, fresher and more beautiful at the breakfast-table than anywhere else ; and Lewis Gordon must have been a most devoted politician, or he would

never have made a point of keeping his eyes sedulously fixed upon the *Times* in the way he did every morning, when that fair creature in the grey cashmere morning wrap, with its rose-coloured silk facings and cord and tassels, was directly opposite to him.

It was a ghastly life, that domestic life of Lewis Gordon.

He rarely softened into the "Lewis of old," *never* but when little Ada's arms were round his neck, and her cheek, that soft rosy cheek, was pressed against his own; then he seemed to forget all his cares and troubles; and in his child's prematurely thoughtful eyes to read a prospect—scarcely that, but a hope—of future happiness. And now for little Ada's sake, for the sake of that over-sensitive child, whose lightest wish was law to the father who had only her to love, Sir Lewis Gordon was more than ever resolved to uphold, with all his authority and power, his wife's position in the world. And little Ada grew in intelligence and beauty every day; and the deep blue, serious eyes grew more serious, earnest, and thoughtful, as the fact of "papa's always being sorry for something" dawned upon her; and with all the strength and fervour of her childish heart she strove to understand him, and soothe him for she knew not what. And gradually, what had first cost him an effort—the smile with which Ada was always greeted—came spontaneously to his lips and eyes, as soon as the latter rested upon Ada; and life was *not* so hard to bear for Lewis Gordon, for there was an "angel in the house."

"Ada looks very pale and heavy-eyed this morning, Bella; her little hands are as hot as possible, too; did you notice it?"

"Notice it? no, Lewis. How nonsensical you are about that child; there's nothing the matter with her; over-eaten herself, perhaps."

"Ada never does *that*," Sir Lewis replied, rather angrily; "you know that as well as I do. Do just see to her; the poor child's head aches, I know, and I'll call in a doctor."

"Really now, there's no occasion for it," said Lady Gordon; "but do, if you are at all anxious about her; as *I* am *not* anxious, I shall go to this concert, as I originally intended. I dare say I shall find Ada all right when I come back. The doctor will give her a powder made of flour, and pocket his fee, and laugh at you for being fussy. However, do as you please."

"I intend to; but you wont—well, never mind."

"Wont what—wont go to this concert? Yes, indeed, I shall."

And so she did; and when she came home, being really attached to her child, she was deeply distressed at finding Ada in a feverish state, moaning and tossing her little crimson face and restless aching limbs from side to side of the bed on which she lay, and by which the father sat anxiously watching. Days and days passed, and little Ada did not get any better, but she did not grow worse apparently; so Lady Gordon ceased to feel frightened and sorry, and began to wish Ada would make haste and get well, and not tie her at home in this way for nothing.

"Lewis's sisters are both away in the country," she said to Miss Julia Young, who was enjoying the honour and glory of a drive in Lady Gordon's carriage, "and I want to go out, and I don't know who I can ask to sit with her; she can't bear Morris, my maid, and she dislikes you," continued Lady Gordon,

with the most uncomplimentary frankness, "or I would ask you to be kind enough. I don't know what to do ; Lewis wont have her left to the servants."

"Ask Mrs. Ferrars," said Julia, promptly ; "she was very fond of Ada."

So she drove at once to Claire, and stated the case so well, made so much of Lewis's anxiety, so little of Ada's real danger, and dwelt so earnestly on the necessity there was for her keeping the appointment she had made to go out that night, that Claire, though much surprised at the request, agreed to it ; and took her place, some hours later, by little Ada's bed, to watch, in the absence of its mother, Lewis Gordon's suffering child.

CHAPTER VIII.

"What shall I be at fifty, if Nature keeps me alive,
If I find the world so bitter when I am but twenty-five?"

LATE that night, when Sir Lewis Gordon, on his return from "the house," made his way softly into the darkened room where little, feverish, moaning Ada lay, he was considerably startled at finding the hand that was so tenderly soothing the child's hot brow, and the voice that was as tenderly murmuring gentle words of encouragement, were the hand and the voice of Claire Ferrars.

"*You* here! Mrs. Ferrars, this is *more* than kind." Then, forgetting all former associations in the one absorbing anxiety, he went on, "And how do you find her—my poor child—my darling? Lie still my darling Ada. How do you find her, Mrs. Ferrars?"

"She is very ill," said Claire, sympathetically, "very ill indeed, dear child; but you know how children suffer—how soon ill and well again. I hope, I trust I shall find her better when I come to inquire in the morning. *Try* not to be so anxious, Sir Lewis," she continued, kindly holding out her hand as she was passing him to leave the room; I know what you are feeling, but try not to be so anxious. And now good night."

"Good night," he replied, scarcely heeding that she

was going ; "God bless you for your kindness to my child. Good night."

Lady Gordon's carriage drew up just as Mrs. Ferrars was stepping from the hall door to her own ; she waited to assure her that she had not quitted her post until one even better entitled to it had come to supersede her.

"It must have been quite a pious flirtation in which Mrs. Ferrars and you have indulged to-night," she said, laughingly looking into her husband's face, after having seen that Ada was no worse ; "I did not think of *your* being home so early when I asked her to stay till my return, or I don't think I should have done it."

"Bella," he said, laying his hand on her arm, and speaking very, very sadly, "don't wrong that woman—I won't ask you not to wrong *me*—I don't care about myself ; but don't *affect* even to wrong that woman who has just left the sick bed of your child ; you cannot, you do not in your heart, but do not affect to."

Years afterwards, when the woman he now addressed could no longer hear and answer him, Lewis Gordon blessed God for granting him patience with her that night—for granting him the patience to attempt to check her wicked, careless words and thoughts.

She never moved her eyes off his face as he continued speaking ; but when he had finished his almost solemnly touching appeal for one woman to another, she bent her head down on her clasped hands and murmured through her tears—the first tears Lewis Gordon had ever known her shed, the first tears that had in fact dimmed the radiance of those eyes, and paled those blooming cheeks for years—"Lewis, Lewis, forgive me ; I did not indeed think it ; from my heart I bless and

thank her, little as my blessing and thanks are worth."

And then she tenderly hung over the bed where poor little Ada lay, wondering what papa and mamma were talking about ; and thought, as she bathed the child's hot brow, and looked into her serious, deep blue eyes, of other eyes, *less* serious when she knew them first, but as deeply blue, whose light she had seen fade and die out suddenly in a far off land, under a cruel blow ; and thinking of these things, Isabel Gordon continued to cry gently.

"Claire," said Alfred Ferrars suddenly to his wife, after asking kindly for little Ada Gordon, "I wish you had told me something that I've heard to-night—not that I cared to know, you know—but it's so confoundedly disagreeable to be told by some one else who supposes you know all about it, and alludes to it and drives you wild, and then finds you know nothing, and has to tell you."

"*What* has been told you, Alfred ? and who has it been told you by ?" asked Claire, quietly.

"Why, that you were mixed up with that affair—engaged to Lewis Gordon (rascal that he is) at one time ; Julia Young let it out quite by accident ; you should have told me yourself, Claire."

"Perhaps I should," she replied calmly ; "I would have done so, Alfred, had I been fully able to explain the circumstances which led to that engagement being broken off, but I could not do so. Do not speak harshly of Lewis Gordon ; there is some dark secret in his life, Alfred. I do not know *what* it is ; but it exists I am sure. I judged it wisest to 'let the dead bury their dead' when I married you, Alfred ; you trust me, I

am sure. If had a thought of Lewis Gordon that *your wife* should *not* have, I should not have been your wife. As to Julia Young letting it out by accident, as you say, I fear you are mistaken ; she has implied several times to me that she conceives it possible I may retain some lingering regard in my most secret heart for Lewis Gordon"—the pure blood rose to Claire's brow as she said it—"and, thinking that, thinking so vilely of me as that, she has striven in her fawning way to win my confidence ; failing *that*, she has attempted—unsuccessfully I know—to make you distrust your wife."

"Let us get rid of her, my darling," said Ferrars, who had forgotten, while his wife was speaking, that he had fancied himself annoyed with her. "That girl has the most disagreeable way of insinuating things, and they bother a fellow ; besides—who knows ?—she may take it into her head to work the other way, and worry *you* about *me*." And Alfred, who felt that, if he was attacked, he could not defend himself with the clear conscience and countenance of his wife, looked seriously discomposed.

"I can't tell her to go, you know, Alfred," said Mrs. Ferrars, laughing ; "but, if you like, we will all go down to Bassingtree to-morrow, as soon as I come back—for in spite of your reproaches, I mean to go—from hearing how little Ada is."

Alfred Ferrars thought the plan such an excellent one, that the next morning a thunderbolt fell upon Julia Young's head, in the form of an announcement that "she must be ready to start by one, as business called them to Bassingtree."

"Good-bye, and thank you very much for coming,"

said Lady Gordon, when Claire was taking leave of her.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Ferrars. Going into the country for a time, are you? God knows what changes may have taken place before I see you again." He was thinking of his little sick daughter, and Claire responded to his thought, as she answered, "The change will be, I hope, that Ada, well and blooming, will run to meet me when next I come here."

"When next I come here!" Changes indeed had taken place before Claire's foot crossed the threshold of Lewis Gordon's door again.

He was almost happy again soon, for Claire's last words were rapidly fulfilling themselves; the crisis was over, the danger past, and little Ada, nearly well again, but paler and thinner of course, was once more a healthy angel in the house to him. He did not live so much to himself now; his wife had been softer and gentler since the shedding of those tears; her child's illness or something—maybe the foreshadowing of a cloud that was hovering about—had considerably subdued the vivacity of the beautiful Lady Gordon. She even condescended to look gratefully on her husband when he proposed that, instead of always being followed by her groom, she should sometimes ride with little Ada and himself; for he had bought Ada a little cantering black pony, a high-minded pony, to whom stumbles were unknown, and whose length of mane and tail and slenderness of leg were not to be easily matched. And Ada was a perfect sight in the park as she cantered along in her blue riding-habit and flowing golden hair, and the little black velvet turban hat, with its bright scarlet cockade—her deep blue eyes deeper than usual,

with delight. And people said, as she passed them, "Gordon's daughter will grow up lovelier than her mother even—she'll have better eyes ; Lady Gordon's are sometimes too fierce—too flashing." And in his heart of hearts Lewis Gordon thought that nothing in this world had ever been so pure, beautiful, and sweet as this child of his ; and acknowledged to himself, with a shudder—even now, when the danger was past—that had she been taken from him, he should have doubted and denied the goodness of his God !

"This is my birthday," thought Lady Gordon, as she sat before her toilet-glass, and Morris stood arranging her hair for dinner. Sir Lewis had a kind of business dinner that day ; his lawyer and his agents were to be there to talk over his prospects at the approaching election ; it was a kind of dinner Lady Gordon hated—but she dared not say so—therefore her heart was not much in "how she looked," and she had consequently time to think of other things of minor importance.

"This is my birthday, and I am only eight-and-twenty ; and, gracious heavens ! *how much I have lived!* I'd go through it all again, though ; it has never been worse than I can bear. I've never been frightened once. Half the women I know would have done all I have done to be able to say what I can say. Only eight-and-twenty, and as beautiful as ever ! *I think more beautiful ;* but then I'm partial, and may delude myself—and what use is it to me now ? (Don't be afraid, reader ! Lady Gordon is not going to indulge in pious reflections on the vanity of earthly possessions.) I have nothing more to gain ; and all the excitement of testing the power of my beauty, and seeing what it

will do for me, is over—for I dare not throw up this chance and trust to fate again. I sometimes wish I was Mrs. Adair, back in Blackheath Park again, with everything to win and nothing to lose. I wish I had gone on the stage. I can only play one part, and I am sick of it. I wish I had known Lola Montes; I should have liked her I am sure, and I would have made a name in the world like she has done. How I should have been petted in London if I had been an actress!—my face would have done it all for me—I need not have worked hard to draw. I wish I had let Claire Reeve marry Lewis; I haven't enjoyed myself so much since I lived here. I wish I was older, and then I should not be so mad for excitement. I think I should be a very nice old lady. I fancy myself, with a large cashmere and a sort of oriental head-dress on, sitting in a corner, watching Ada, at a ball. If I was older, I could take more interest in dear little Ada; but now I can't. I love her; but I get tired. Why, Ada is ten years old, and in ten years more she'll be twenty; and I shall be only thirty-eight, and, probably, as handsome—no, *that's* not the word for *me*,—as beautiful as I am now. I daresay I shall be jealous of her. How easy it must be for ugly people to be good. I would hang every ugly, bad, wicked woman; because they have no excuse for being so. If I had expressionless eyes and a pasty complexion, like that girl that was staying with Mrs. Ferrars a long time ago, I would be humble, and pious, and good; and I'd visit the sick, and teach in a Sunday school. Dear, dear! I tried that once, a long time ago, I remember—before I married—and I felt most uncomfortable; just as if I had got, by mistake, into a saucepan where a

lot of cabbages had been boiled. All the children smelt of cabbage. I have never really cared for any one but Lewis ; and at one time—when he cared for me—I treated him badly, and he can't forget it now I want him to. He used to be so gay and handsome ; that was what I liked him for first. That other poor boy took everything so seriously—what was play to me was death to him. I couldn't cry for him, though I felt freer when I hadn't to watch *his* face any longer, to see how he would take what I might be saying. I wish his eyes had not been blue ; that's one reason why I can never bear Ada to look at me long ; blue eyes *say more*—if they say anything at all—than dark ones."

"There, that will do, Morris, the star a little lower, to show more in front."

And then she went down, and received her husband's friends so charmingly that they assured him, over their wine, that "if he could persuade her ladyship to go down and canvass for him his election would be sure."

Quietly, and without events of any kind to mark them, the next two or three years passed over the heads of the principal actors in my little drama. Sir Lewis Gordon, a handsome, thoughtful looking man, found interest enough to keep his mind from dwelling on any painful past, in his public life. And at home there was always Ada—lovely Ada, who was merging from childhood to girlhood without any intermediate gawkiness, by "special command" from Nature. Serious-eyed Ada, who learnt all that could be taught her "with understanding," and a great deal that could *not* be taught her ; and amongst these latter things may be mentioned her quick, never-failing sympathy

and interest in all that in any way concerned her father; and her ardent return for his passionate love for her. And more than ever in those deep blue eyes, and on that clear, transparent looking brow, did Sir Lewis Gordon read a prospect, for it was that now of future happiness.

These quiet years tried Lady Gordon dreadfully. True, she was at the head of a fine establishment; true, she had a loving, lovely child; true, her husband was outwardly devoted to her; but that was not enough. She moved proudly on, a beautiful, solitary star, wishing—poor, misguided woman—for a change. And it came at last.

It was one of those calms in life, after a series of storms which quiet-natured people *can* stand, and *like* even. But there are some—and they need not of necessity be of the Lady Gordon order—who *cannot* stand them; who loathe their lives, when those lives are stagnant; who pant for change, when no change apparently can better them. Well for those who *can* “sit down upon the yellow sand,” and wish placidly that it was “always afternoon.” They rarely do mischief, these people—they never do good, of course—but they rarely do mischief. One meets them every day of one’s life; it’s the other kind who are exceptional; and they generally give a person, who does not happen to be a fellow Lotus-eater the fidgets. It is always well when women are blessed with this temperament; it keeps them fat, and steady, and respectable, under divers difficulties and temptations, and enables them, without effort, “to do their duty in that station of life into which it has pleased God to call them.” They are frequently “rigidly righteous” and “unco’ wise,”

and we know what Burns says about that class. But then Burns was only a poet; life used him hardly, and he got disgusted with it occasionally—which was also the case with Lady Gordon. And this brings me back to the statement with which I started, viz., that these quiet years tried Lady Gordon dreadfully.

CHAPTER IX.

“The curse is come upon me,” cried the Lady of Shalot.

AGAIN the summer sun is pouring down his rays on hot, busy Regent-street; again the lady, with the flashing eyes and cheeks so gloriously tinted, that men in passing look at them admiringly *without* suspicion, and women, though they cannot withhold the admiration *with*, is walking along. But no longer alone, the fair rose-bud, the serious-eyed Ada is by her side; they have sent the carriage to the club for Sir Lewis, who is to join them in a shop presently, to select the exact tint of “purple and pink” which he wishes them to make up into bows and cockades for his—the Liberal candidate’s—approaching election. She is scarcely altered at all from the “Mrs. Adair” we have seen there before; her form may have gained a little in fulness and roundness; it certainly has in dignified grace; she has faced the world in a prominent position for a long time now, and she has the port and bearing of a queen. Sir Lewis had been defeated in that election; his agents talked to him about the day Lady Gordon was twenty-eight; and now he was going to take the advice he disregarded then, and send his beautiful wife, who took but a languid interest in it, down to canvass for him.

She looked too young to be the mother of that girl by her side. For Ada was tall for her age, and elegant

for any age. It is an extremely difficult matter to associate the idea of fourteen with elegance ; her beauty was of such a different type to her mother's that you could never think of comparing them—the one was all fire and passion ; the other, all pathos, and love, and purity.

And now Sir Lewis joins them, and Lady Gordon's languid interest becomes more languid still, for her pride and self-love is wounded by his first appeal being made to Ada, who, quick to feel and see everything, adroitly refers him to her mother just in time to prevent the latter announcing that she "did not mean to have anything to do with it ;" which little outburst of temper would only have been another proof of the truth of that which I asserted just now, that these quiet years had tried her dreadfully.

Sir Lewis Gordon sat alone sipping his wine that evening. They were going to have a grand reception, and Lady Gordon, therefore, had not lingered long over the dessert, for she wished to achieve a more than usually exquisite toilette ; and such things take time, so she had left him sipping his wine alone. His face bore a rather complacent expression. His election was tolerably sure ; it was to come off to-morrow, and his solicitor had been with him that evening, and pronounced it "safe," so his face bore a complacent expression ; for it is pleasant, having once tasted the delights of being there, to get back to "the House." He was still young enough, too, to take pleasure in the pageant part of the affair that was coming off to-morrow. He thought with pride how lovely Ada would look in the open carriage-and-four, wearing his colours, by the side of her mother. He did not think

much about how Lady Gordon would look. But the mental vision of those horses was pleasant; they were grey, matched each other to a hair's breadth in height, and nearly to a hair in colour. The getting them had cost him many an anxious, happy hour. Yes, Ada and the horses would look very well.

He looked dreamily forward through a vista of years to the time when Ada should be grown up—to the time when, entering some brilliant room with Ada on his arm, he should hear the murmur of admiration which would greet the first appearance of the “beautiful Miss Gordon.” “She is worthy of the name, thank God! in *every way* she is worthy of the name.” And he almost reproached himself for thinking so much of her superb loveliness when she had such a high intellect and such a noble heart. Still, though a “fountain may not fail the less whose sands are golden ore,” Mr. N. P. Willis tells us, Sir Lewis Gordon may be forgiven for thinking first of the pride of the eye.

Lady Gordon stood in her dressing-room listening laughingly to Ada's suggestions as to the dispositions of her jewellery—for Ada had an artist's eye—suggestions as gravely given by blue-eyed Ada as if they concerned the hanging of a picture, or the placing of a statue, as she lay carelessly back on a little couch looking at her beautiful mother under the chandelier.

She was worth looking at that night if ever she had been. What influence was it that deepened on *that* night that woman's beauties a thousandfold? Her eyes were more luminous, her hair more intensely black; the pure white of her brow, the rich colour on her cheeks, were each clearer, more vivid than ever; the carriage of her head was loftier, the outline of her figure

seemed more magnificent. Ada always thought of her mother afterwards as she looked then, standing in all her glorious beauty under the lamp, smiling at her child.

"You must always wear blue velvet and diamonds, mamma. I thought the other night black and coral, but I've altered my mind, and it must be blue and diamonds. There, hold up your arm as you had it then when I spoke. What a picture you'd make!"

Ada put her head on one side to enjoy the picture of the diamond-lighted loveliness, and Lady Gordon laughed and said:—

"Yes, she would always wear the gems that won such a meed of admiration."

There was a knock at the door of the dressing-room, and Morris went to it, and came back with a message for her mistress.

"A gentleman wanted to speak to my lady; he was down in the library."

"Some one about this electioneering business, I suppose, Morris?"

"I don't know, my lady."

She leisurely clasped a bracelet on her round, white arm.

"Wait here, Ada; I shall come up again before the people arrive." And so saying, she descended to give audience to this business man.

The door was open; but when she had passed through, a quiet, middle-aged man, who was standing there waiting for her, closed it, and she saw standing before the window, with his back to her, another man with a large rough coat on.

"I have very little time to spare now," she began,

in her silvery tones, scarcely looking at the sober gentleman she was addressing, and walking on for the fire and mantelpiece lamplight to fall full upon her. "Any arrangements that are not completed I will see you about to-morrow as early as you like."

"All arrangements are completed," the quiet gentleman who had closed the door replied, "and the less delay there is now the better: Mills, come here. Lady Gordon, you are arrested on a charge of having intermarried with two other men, your first husband being still alive."

She flew past them before they could stop her, and opening the door, screamed, "Lewis, Lewis!" and then fell down a shuddering mass at their feet in the doorway.

"What is the meaning of this? Who has dared to insult—Good Heavens! what is it, Isabel?" She had continued screaming until her startled husband had rushed to her side; but she changed it to a wail as he touched and tried to raise her—holding up her face, all changed with a white horror, and her trembling, clasped hands, and muttering hoarsely—for her very voice changed in her mortal fear—"Save me, Lewis! I've lived with you all these years; don't let them take me. Save me, save me!" And then again her shrieks and cries of despair rose high, and bringing, as they did, a staring body of wondering domestics round, they nearly goaded him to madness.

"Send Miss Ada away *at once*," he shouted out. "Tell her *I desire* it. Send her to my mother at once." And then, closely followed by the two men, he lifted his wife up and carried her into the room from which she had attempted to fly.

"What is the meaning of all this?" he exclaimed, almost choking with passion as her screams redoubled, and from their violence the blood gushed in a crimson flood from her mouth. "My God! speak, one of you, or I shall go mad."

"I am very sorry for you, Sir Lewis," said the man who had spoken first—"very sorry, indeed; but there's no help for you. I am the solicitor employed by a man of the name of Withers. *Her* husband (he indicated with a jerk of his thumb the prostrate woman before them) was transported under the name of Dessanges. She married you fifteen years ago, knowing this man to be alive. Then she got tired of you, or quarrelled with you," he added hastily, a dangerous gleam in Sir Lewis's eyes warning him not to probe unnecessarily a wounded man—"and left you under some pretence and went to Italy, when she married a man of the name of Fanshawe. He died suddenly some time after. She told him, in one of her nettlesome moods, that instead of being the young widow he thought her, she was *your* wife, and I have learnt that the shock killed him. Then, after a time—with that portion of her life I have nothing to do, though, for she didn't marry any one else. However, she came back, and—my God! what is this?"

He might well ask, and then fall shuddering back as he did. The terrible fear had been too much for her. She had risen while he was making out his charge against her—his charge which seemed to be turning her husband into stone—and tried to reach Sir Lewis, tried to clasp his knees and implore him "not to let them take her away, and do to her"—she knew not what; but before she could do so she fell at his feet—dead!

"My client's case is ended, indeed," said the solicitor respectfully, after a time, during which Sir Lewis had raised her once more to the couch. "I give you my word, Sir Lewis Gordon, that this sad secret shall remain one still."

They carried her away and laid her on her own bed and took off the velvets and jewels, and she lay there in her dead beauty, with her lovely face white, and her brilliant eyes closed for ever, and her busy brain and erring heart at rest now—alone.

All through that night Sir Lewis Gordon sat like a stunned man, looking at the spot where his wife had fallen in trying to reach him to make her last appeal; he could not feel grief for her, but he felt such horror as he had never thought he *could* feel and *live*.

Every now and then a cold shiver possessed him strongly; but still he sat there in the room where the life had fled in haste and dread—alone.

Years, years ago, while yet Lewis Gordon was a boy almost, he had met a beautiful girl—more beautiful than in his wildest dreams he had ever thought a woman could be—a beautiful girl—a widow. Without thinking of anything but his passionate love for her—full of faith, trust, and love—he never paused to make inquiry as to the antecedents of the woman he was going to make his wife, but married her at once, keeping it secret from every one, and for a few months he was happy. But after a time, petted and worshipped as she was, she grew weary and sad, and discontented-looking; and at last he woke from his dream to hear her name—*not his*, none knew she was *his* wife—coupled lightly with another man's. She grew careless of him, and seemed to cease from loving him. One day, after taunting and quarrelling with

him, she told him she had heard that her first husband was still alive, and that therefore she should leave him. She did so ; and he soon heard it was to join *his friend* Herbert Fanshawe in Italy. He did *not* hear that she married Fanshawe, and then broke his heart by telling him that she was already his friend's wife.

After Fanshawe's death she came back to England, and was carrying on the war in a style she loved, having plenty of money, and no restraint, when the evil genius of her life, Withers, her first husband, appeared on the scene again. His threat to claim her, and betray to Lewis Gordon that she had no hold on him, was the power he had over the unfortunate woman ; and whenever she did not keep him well supplied with money, he held out his threat, and found it never failed of its object. She would have pawned not only her soul, but what she valued more, her jewels, to keep him from freeing Lewis—the only man she had ever really loved—from her. The moment she saw her way clearly to get for ever, as she hoped, out of the power of the coarse, low ruffian to whom she had been married when a child almost, and whom she hated with all the deadly hatred of her powerful nature—with a hatred that had changed and vitiated her heart. As soon as she saw her way clearly to get quit of him, and regain Lewis, she took that course unhesitatingly. With what success we have seen.

With such a nature as hers was it any wonder that she had *dared* everything through life, and *died* the moment “daring” would no longer avail her ?

Sir Lewis Gordon sat, as I have said, through the whole of that night, thinking of these things, or at

least having such portions of this sad history as he was acquainted with, flash through his brain fitfully. He was, as I said before, stunned.

That his wife—she at least who for so many years he had thought his wife—had died violently, suddenly, fearfully, in that very room, he was dimly conscious of; that some one had come in and attempted to speak comfort to him, he was dimly conscious of also. The words “some one” had used came back as the hours crept on. “You have Ada still—think of *that*, dear Lewis—think of Ada. You must rouse yourself, for Ada’s sake; she must hear of this from *you* alone. Think of Ada.”

When morning dawned, he stood up and shook himself, and then he remembered all clearly. His wife was dead, and Maggie, his sister, had been with him telling him that he “had still Ada.”

“Thank God for *that*,” he cried out, heartily. And then he was himself again.

His sister Maggie—Mrs. Berners—a happy wife and mother now, but still, as of old, the same devoted, loving sister to Lewis, came in soon after.

“I have locked up everything, dear Lewis,” she said, “all her drawers, and desks, and things. You had better come back to mamma’s now with me. That poor child is nearly frantic; nothing, *nothing* will quiet her but seeing you. You must come to Ada, Lewis.”

How poor Ada learnt the truth—that the mother who had left her but a few short hours before, rich in such health and beauty as but seldom fall to the lot of woman—was now lying cold, dead, in the very room in which she had bidden her little daughter

remain "until she went back," I will not attempt to describe. When her aunt, Mrs. Berners, went into the room where the father and daughter had been alone for an hour or two, the tale had been told, and Ada, her first burst of sorrow over, was lying clasped in her father's arms, looking up in his face with her deep blue eyes, and in that clasp the poor child was finding comfort.

There was a grand funeral soon, and though people talked and whispered, nothing was ever known. The most generally received statement was, that Lady Gordon was such a madly-ambitious woman that she had broken a blood-vessel on the brain, from the effects of passion, on hearing, the night previous to a contested election, that her husband was likely to be defeated. Another was, that she had died from a heart-complaint, to which she had been long subject; and to this last Sir Lewis Gordon agreed.

So beautiful Lady Gordon was laid in Kensal Green Cemetery, and a splendid monument was erected to her memory, on which her name and age were plainly set forth, but no "virtues" and no "regrets." Indeed, from the absence of these, casual observers have made the mistake of thinking a good woman lay beneath that white marble.

CHAPTER X.

Oh ! I see the crescent promise of my spirit hath not set,
Ancient founts of inspiration well thro' all my fancy yet.

"ADA looks pale, poor darling," said Mrs. Berners to her brother, 'one fine morning, some two or three months after that dismal night. "If I were you, Lewis, I would take her abroad."

"Do you think so, Maggie?" said her brother, rising up, and speaking anxiously. "She seems to me so much more cheerful. However, I mean to go somewhere soon ; I have not decided 'where' yet. But, before I go, there's one thing I want done, Maggie, and I shrink from doing it myself. Will you assist me?"

"If I can, Lewis."

"Well, it's just to look over poor Isabel's papers and things. I don't want them left in disorder any longer. If you will look them over, and destroy what you think proper, and keep anything you think Ada ought to have, I shall be very much indebted to you."

She promised to do so that very morning, and left him for the purpose. At about twelve, Ada came into the room in her hat and habit.

"Aunt Maggie advised me to go for a ride, papa dear ; will you come with me ? and *may* I ride poor mamma's horse ? Will you let me ? I love that horse so !"

Sir Lewis told her she might do so ; and soon the proud, happy father was watching the colour come to her face, and the light to her eyes, as they rode along.

"You manage him well, Ada."

"Yes, papa dear," she replied. "Isn't he quiet and good with me—a darling!" she continued, fondly patting the glossy neck of the matchless bay. "He seems to know he mustn't prance about with me."

Ah, Ada ! pat him kindly, caress him fondly, love him dearly ; he has a double claim.

Carry her carefully, gallant little bay—carry her carefully, for the sake of one whose grave is far away, under a southern sun.

"Is Mrs. Berners here still?" asked Sir Lewis of the servant who opened the door to them, on their return from their ride—Ada's first ride on the bay.

"Yes, Sir Lewis."

"I'll run and tell auntie what a darling he has been," cried Ada, springing up the steps. "She *will* be surprised to hear I have ridden *him*."

But presently Ada came down again, still in her hat and habit, and with a disappointed look in her tender, dark-blue eyes. "Aunt Maggie would not let me in, papa," she said, poutingly ; "and she doesn't seemed the least pleased to hear I've enjoyed my ride ; and I can hardly get her to answer me at all."

"Well, never mind, pet," said her father, laughing ; "she is busy now, you know. Besides, she does not care for horses as you do, Miss Ada. Aunt Maggie does not know what promotion it is to spring from the black pony to the bay horse."

"I really believe she does not, papa," said Ada,

merrily ; “ she thinks one horse as good as another, you know. Well ! I’ll go and take off my hat.”

“ And make haste about it, darling. I want you to read to me.”

Before Ada came down, a quiet step in the room, and then a hand on his shoulder, roused Sir Lewis.

“ Hallo, Maggie ! What’s the matter ?”

Why will people—women especially—keep “ diaries.” They rarely enter anything in them worth remembering, or that they can, with common patience, bear to read after they *have* written it. Mrs. Thrale may be cited as an instance of a woman’s keeping a diary, and being sensible at the same time. “ Keep a diary, madam,” said Dr. Johnson, and she did it, of course. But hers is an exceptional case.

Two of the most simple women whom I have the happiness of knowing—and I have known a good many—are the two most inveterate diary-keepers. They never, either of them, give utterance to any but the baldest trash ; they haven’t a respectable idea between them ; and if they possessed one they couldn’t clothe it in respectable language. Yet both these women keep “ diaries,” and write whole pages of rubbish daily. I have sat for an hour in a state of paralysed horror, and watched one of these misguided women labouring away at spoiling paper. She could not be putting down her thoughts on any subject, for she had none to put down. She could not be stating the date of any important event concerning herself or others, for nothing important ever happened to herself or to any one with whom she was brought in contact. She never read, and she never wrote anything but her precious

"diary;" and yet she could write it before my aggrieved eyes.

"Lewis," Mrs. Berners said, laying her head down on the hand which she had placed on her brother's shoulder, and with such deep pity in her tones, that the handsome, stalwart man, who had weathered the worst storm he thought that could break over his head, felt a sudden qualm at his heart. "Lewis, I can hardly bear to tell—you have had so much—so very much to hurt and grieve you in life—and this will be harder than all ; but I have no right to keep the truth from you, dear, dear Lewis."

He felt there was a blow coming, and, like a man, he rose to meet it. Standing up, he removed his sister's clinging clasp, and holding her hands firmly, he looked down gravely into her face.

"I know your occupation of this morning, my dear Maggie," he said, gravely ; "if any knowledge has been gained by you that is painful, and that still *I may be spared*, you will spare me, wont you, dear ? She is dead now. God forgive her, as I have done ; and if you have gained fresh evidence during this morning's work of my poor wife's frailty, forgive her, too, Maggie, and don't tell me."

"Lewis, it is something you ought to know—at least, I thought you ought to know it when I came down ; and even now, though your appeal has made me doubt and hesitate, I still think I should be wrong in keeping it from you."

"For God's sake ! quickly, then," he exclaimed. "Don't torture me by delay ; the worst will be better, knowing what I know already, than suspense."

"Lewis, how will you even bear to hear that Ada, our darling Ada, is not——"

"What?" he interrupted, fiercely, tightening, as he spoke, his clutch upon her hands. "Out with it, Maggie! out with it, for Heaven's sake!"

"Is not your daughter," she sobbed. And then she fell back, frightened at the effect of her own words.

He had said that the worst he could hear, knowing what he already knew, would be better than suspense; and now, when he heard it, he felt that it was worse than any possible end deductions from the past had caused him to draw. He muttered, "My God! I won't believe it; anything but that, Maggie. Tell me anything but that."

Alas! his sister had nothing else to tell him. She could only cry, and console, and lament, and cry again.

"I love her so; I could not lose her, Maggie."

He had risen to meet the blow, but now he sat down, leaning his elbows on his knees, and his face on his hands, in a broken, humbled way, that wrung his sister's heart to witness. There was no anger at the trick that had been played upon him; no wrath; only bitter sorrow, anguished regret, that Ada should not be his child; no indignation that he had been made to believe that she was.

"I could not lose her, Maggie," he repeated. "Bella was cruel to let me think it, and grow to love her so; and now to lose her. Tell me why you think that my darling is not my own? For Heaven's sake tell me, and it may be cleared up. You may be mistaken."

"Yes, directly, dear; but, Lewis, there is no mis-

take ; if there had been, do you think I would have wounded you so ?”

“I have lost everything—everything in life that I’ve set my heart upon has failed me ; and now I know that nothing has been hard but *this*. I have had my little Ada’s love so long. Oh, my God !”

Strong sobs shook the frame of the grave, cool man ; and this was a more painful sight for his sister than aught else could have been, for she had seen him bear other griefs so quietly.

“Thank God !” she said at last, “that your first thought is a dread that you may lose the *child*, instead of withdrawing your love from her. She need never know that she is not your daughter, Lewis ; there are none to be wronged by your keeping her ; and there will be no wrong to her in keeping her in ignorance. You know how safe the secret will be with me, dear, and you need not love her less.”

The fact that he could keep her still, and love her still, was but poor comfort to Lewis Gordon, as from the papers (old letters out of Bella’s diary) he sat sadly assuring himself of the horrible truth. The confirmation they afforded was strong as proof of Holy Writ ; from them he learnt that Ada was not his, but Herbert Fanshawe’s child.

He was bitterly wounded and disappointed ; this thing was a terrible, crushing blow ; and, as he had said, everything had failed him in life, so it fell upon him with more annihilating force than it would have done upon a happier, more successful man. Indeed, there are few capable of hearing that the child who has been so unspeakably dear and precious, partly because it is their very own, for many years, is not their own, after all, without being bitterly wounded

and disappointed. Ada had reconciled Lewis Gordon to the loss of so much. He would have combated Mrs. Adair's claim on him had not Ada grown to be too dear to him during that time when he had been at Bassingtree for him to do anything that might tend to injure her in the future. And now he was told that she was not his own child.

He was undecided for a time whether or not to keep Ada in ignorance of his lack of legal claim on the love she had rendered him so freely, and which he prized so highly. "She ought to know who her father was," he thought, for his mind had been rudely torn from its moorings, and was drifting about wildly in these first hours of his agony.

"Don't tell her, poor child! Why make *her* suffer to no good end, Lewis?" Mrs. Berners pleaded; "and to your own greater pain; it would be cruel, cruel."

But fate had been so cruel to Lewis that he could not be kind even to this idolized child, whose serious blue eyes would never meet his own again without recalling the memory of her father to his mind—*her* father who had wronged him! "No; he did not do that, poor fellow!" he exclaimed aloud, as this latter thought struck him. "At least, not intentionally. Send Ada to me, Maggie; I must see her before I can determine what I shall do."

Aunt Maggie's unusual tears alarmed Miss Gordon. And the sobbing directions Mrs. Berners gave her, "to go to papa at once, and not to mind, and to bear something or other," that Ada did not stay to listen to, sent her down to her father's side in a tremor like a frightened bird.

"What is it, papa—what is the matter?" she began, breathlessly, going up and putting her arms tightly

round his neck and kissing him with desperate impatience, that reminded him of what her mother had been wont to evince when he knew her first. "Aunt Maggie is so strange—and you—what's the matter with *you*, papa dear?"

All Lewis Gordon's attachments were passionate ones—so passionate that it was a marvel how he ever came to survive the rupture of them, one after another, in the way he had done. He felt now, as he clasped Ada to his heart and kissed her with convulsive energy, that to lose her would be more than death to him—and that there would be agony in losing one jot of her devotion, respect, and regard. "And I shall always fancy she's lacking in them if she once knows she isn't my own daughter," he thought, with a true knowledge of the jealousy of his nature. But still he had not quite made up his mind as to whether he would tell her or not.

"Speak to me, papa dear," she said presently, with a little caressing gesture.

"What would be the worst news you could hear, Ada?" he asked, gently. And her cheeks paled to the hue of a lily as she said, eagerly—

"There's nothing the matter with *you*?—that would be the worst; oh, papa!" Her hands were clasped imploringly, and her deep blue eyes seemed to pierce into his soul ("Ah! my God! they have *her father's* glance," he thought); but he only said—

"No, my pet! nothing is the matter with me."

"Oh, then, it's Aunt Maggie, or Georgie—do tell me—is it Georgie?" she said, quickly, for her youngest aunt was very dear to her heart.

"No; nothing!"

"Then it's the bay!" Ada said, springing off her

father's knee, and quivering with excitement. "Oh ! I haven't hurt the little bay—mamma's own dear little horse."

More than ever did he feel that she would do "credit to the name." No ; he could not tell her and weaken the link that bound her to him.

"It was a shame to try you, pet," he said fondly—"The bay is off his corn, that's all—but you shall ride him again to-morrow."

"Ah ! but you *did* frighten me," the girl said. "Papa dear, don't do it again." And as he looked at her dilating eyes and heard the loud beating of her heart, Sir Lewis Gordon resolved upon not telling her that truth which would have frightened her far more.

Often when he looked into Ada's serious eyes he felt as if his heart must be stone indeed, or now it would surely break ; and yet he did not love the child the less.

Indeed, he soon found solid comfort in the thought that no living person had a closer claim on Ada than himself ; for Fanshawe's father and mother were dead, and his sisters were married and had children of their own now, and might not have cared to learn that "poor Herbert" had left a little daughter.

So, though his last grand hope in life had failed him in a measure, Lewis Gordon determined on keeping Ada still—and keeping her in ignorance ; determined on shielding from all that could pain or distress, with all the power of his mighty love, the daughter of his heart.

He carried her away to Italy, and they stayed for a time in the place where Herbert Fanshawe died. And one evening Ada was taken to see the grave of an

"old friend of his," he called him. And when Sir Lewis Gordon told the story of that young fair man dying suddenly from the effects of some terrible grief, some fearful secret that he learnt, Ada's tears flowed fast, and all unconsciously she sobbed and sorrowed over her father's grave. And Lewis Gordon felt neither anger nor jealousy at the sight.

If only the "dead *could* know when to come back and be forgiven."

His life had been like a summer day, the sun of which has been suddenly broken and dispersed for ever by a violent storm. He could never raise that fair head of his from the moment he knew that men might say he had "dishonoured his friend," for Lewis Gordon had been his friend. She had been false to Gordon, and cruelly false to him; and yet he could *not* cease from loving her. He died loving her—breathing *her* name when breath was fleeting away fast, and each was a long-drawn agony. Looking at her with the love of a man, who had never known lighter loves, in his eyes, when those eyes were glazing rapidly. And now Lewis Gordon stood by his grave with pity in his heart; for *him*, and Ada, *her* daughter and his own, knelt there, sobbing.

A fair marble tomb was raised over the spot where the "young Englishman," who had died so long ago, lay. The design of that tomb was drawn by Ada, who threw her whole heart and artist's soul into the work.

Sir Lewis Gordon stayed there long enough to see it completed, and then they left the place for other and less sorrowful scenes. And their course was so erratic that letters from England were long in finding

them always, and some never reached them at all. So he was behind the rest of the world in hearing of some changes that had taken place down at Bassingtree.

Alfred Ferrars had gone down to the Hall with his wife, to live the life of a country gentleman ; and being a light-hearted, healthy young fellow, he found the life very much to his taste. His was just that nature that derives the purest pleasure from undergoing hard manual labour in turnip-fields all the day, with a gun on his shoulder, and a game-bag slung to his side, and a brace of fine pointers on the alert at his feet. He asked for nothing better in the world than his very fortunate marriage had brought him—the right to shoot over many hundred acres, well stocked with game all day, and to go to sleep in a luxuriously-furnished drawing-room of his own all the evening. Claire never objected either to his prolonged absence or sleepy presence ; in fact, Claire, though a good, affectionate wife, was not sufficiently devoted to be *exigeante* ; and I don't know whether a man is not more agreeably circumstanced when such is the case. Claire welcomed him home with a happy smile, but she never reproached him for having being long away, nor did she repine over the insensibility he usually evinced in the shooting season to the charms of domesticity generally. His was a physique that craved for a great deal of out-of-door recreation ; and Claire saw no manner of objection to his gratifying that craving. The money was all hers ; therefore, like any woman worthy the name of one, she would have been more than pained if the man she had married had shown distrust of her by being chary of spending it. And, to do him all justice, Alfred Fer-

rars was far from showing such distrust—he spent it right royally.

The Bassingtree stables, during the feminine régime, had fallen rather into decay and disuse. A pair of fat carriage-horses, Claire's ponies, and her riding-horse, had been the sole occupants of stalls that were famous in old Mr. Reeves' time, by reason of their being always well filled. Now, under Alfred's auspices, they resumed their former characteristics, and were famous and well filled once more.

If Claire was not a passionately devoted wife to this second love of hers, she was an intelligently sympathetic one, which is, after all, the more important when the honeymoon is over. He was as eager to show his wife every new horse he bought, to trot out every fresh "deal" on the lawn for her inspection and approval, as most men are to defer that pleasure. She was never discouraging, never suggested that his horses already hadn't half work enough, but were eating their heads off in the stables. She never asked him what he wanted *another* horse for, or said, "Well, my dear, you know best," in a way that implies that the speaker thinks *she* knows a great deal best, only you are brute enough not to listen to her. In a word, she never bored him with good advice, and he adored her for it, and was supremely happy.

The hunting season was coming on, and the first meet was to take place on the Bassingtree lawn, and the local papers announced in enthusiastic print, and terms of heartfelt admiration, that Alfred Ferrars, Esq., would give a splendid breakfast on the occasion, to which all the gentlemen of the hunt were invited. It is a curious thing that otherwise intelligent men will persist in this maniacal practice of giving hunt break-

fasts which no one ever eats. They drop in—the noble sportsmen—in a desultory kind of way, if they are near the house and it's a blank day, and drink champagne, but they never eat the splendid breakfasts that are provided for them ; and still, though this is a well understood thing, these breakfasts continue to be given.

“Shall you ride ‘Tom Tit’ on Thursday, Alfred?” Mrs. Ferrars asked her husband one morning at breakfast ; and he said “N-o” in a way that portended the purchase of a new horse, she felt at once.

“What colour is the new one to be?” she asked, laughing ; and Alfred answered with a certain air of deprecation, for he was conscious that he might have been contented with the three hunters he already possessed.

“Well, Claire, he's a chestnut, one of the best looking horses I ever saw” (Alfred said this regularly of every horse he bought or wished to buy), “and Bulkeley offered him to me at such a low figure that I couldn't resist him. Put on your hat, and I'll have him out on the lawn for you.”

“Yes ; is it cold ?” Mrs. Ferrars asked.

“No, not a bit. Make haste, there's a dear ; for when you've seen him, I mean to have the saddle on him, and try him over some of the fields round here. Bulkeley tells me he had him in Northamptonshire last year, and there wasn't a horse like him at timber.”

“What did Bulkeley part with him for ?” asked Mrs. Ferrars, as the chestnut was run round the lawn for her benefit, and cleverly brought up by the groom, with his front legs on a slight elevation just before her. He was a wicked-looking horse, with restless

eyes and quick-moving ears, like most chestnuts. But unquestionably he was very handsome.

"Don't you like him?" Alfred asked.

"Well, hardly, to tell the truth, Alfred; he is a showy horse, a nice park hack, I should fancy; but, my dear Alfred, does he look like doing what we want of a hunter on this land? Nasty beast! how he's drawing his lip a-one-side. Just look at him. Chestnuts are always shifty, Alfred, and this looks the shiftiest of his colour I've ever seen."

She had rarely said so much that was adverse to the purchase of a horse before, but Alfred Ferrars "liked the look of the chestnut too well" to heed her half-withheld advice. He bought him of Bulkeley, who congratulated himself on having got well rid of the most vicious brute that had ever darkened his stable-doors; and Alfred Ferrars rode the shifty chestnut to the first meet of the season, which was inaugurated by a breakfast at his own house.

They told long in that county side how the glories of what would otherwise have been the best day of the season were darkened, and how the hilarious merriment engendered in the breasts of some of the keenest of the sportsmen through really *seeing* a fox was quenched. It was a short story, and a sad one. The chestnut balked a rasping fence, like the vicious brute he was, and rolled over on himself and his rider, crushing the latter to a cruel death, and leaving Claire a widow.

I have nothing to add, unless it may interest you to hear that about a year after the chestnut balked his fence, and some months after the marble tomb was raised to the memory of poor Herbert Fanshawe, Mrs. Alfred Ferrars was driving her clipped bays through

the village of Bassingtree, when she was met and stopped by the Misses Young.

"What improvements you seem to be making at the Hall," said Emily ; "is it true that you are adding to the left wing ?"

Claire's face had looked very pale inside the bonnet of black crape which she wore, with the tiny border of widow's cap just showing, but the old "young" bloom came back, as she answered—

"Yes ; *I am* expecting Sir Lewis and Miss Gordon down here."

"For a long stay ?" asked Julia ; and Mrs. Ferrars smiled, as she answered—

"A *very* long one, probably."

On the whole, Lewis Gordon awoke to a very fair reality, when his early dreams were dispelled.

THE END.

LONDON:
ROBSON AND SON, GREAT NORTHERN PRINTING WORKS,
PANCRAS ROAD, N.W.

In Sixpenny Volumes, Covers printed in Colours.

THE
PARLOUR LIBRARY.
SIXPENNY SERIES

The following Works, forming the first portion of the SIXPENNY SERIES of the PARLOUR LIBRARY, are in active preparation; many of them are now ready; and the whole will be produced in rapid succession:—

1. THE YOUNG LADY'S BOOK OF TALES. Numerous superb Illustrations.
2. THE BOY'S OWN BOOK OF TALES. Numerous superb Illustrations.
3. THE SHIP-CHANDLER, and other Tales. By G. A. SALA.
4. THE FAMILY CREDIT. By WESTLAND MARSTON, LL.D.
5. THE FILIBUSTER, and other Tales. By ALBANY FONBLANQUE.
6. CRUISE OF THE BLUE JACKET, and other Tales. By Lieutenant WARNEFORD, R.N.
7. UNDISCOVERED CRIMES. By "WATERS," Author of "Recollections of a Police Officer," &c.
8. LADY LORME: a Novel. By ANNIE THOMAS.
9. MUTINY OF THE SATURN, and other Sea Tales. By Lieutenant WARNEFORD, R.N.
10. THE FAIR OF EMY VALE. A Tale. By WILLIAM CARLETON.
11. PERFIDY OF CAPTAIN SLYBOOTS, and other Tales. By G. A. SALA.
12. "GIVE A DOG A BAD NAME, AND ——" By ALBANY FONBLANQUE.
13. THE WIFE'S PORTRAIT. By WESTLAND MARSTON, LL.D.
14. MRS. WALDEGRAVE'S WILL, and other Tales. By ALBANY FONBLANQUE.
15. EXPERIENCES OF A REAL DETECTIVE. By "WATERS," Author of "Recollections of a Police Officer," &c.
16. THE LATE MR. D——, and other Tales. By G. A. SALA.
17. THE BOOK OF MORAL TALES. Numerous Illustrations.
18. THE GIRL'S OWN BOOK OF TALES. Numerous Illustrations.
19. THE LITTLE RED MAN, and other Fairy Tales. Numerous Illustrations.
20. THE SILVER ACRE: a Tale. By WILLIAM CARLETON.
21. THE DREAM AND THE WAKING: a Tale. By ANNIE THOMAS.
22. THE VALAZY FAMILY. By "WATERS."
23. TURF CHARACTERS.

*** Several other most valuable Copyright Works will be added at short intervals.*

LONDON: WARD, LOCK, & TYLER, PATERNOSTER ROW.

